No Harm List

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Characters:	Freddie Lounds, Will Graham, Will Graham's Dogs, Hannibal Lecter, Jimmy Price, Brian Zeller, Jack Crawford, Beverly Katz, Bedelia Du Maurier, Abel Gideon, Abigail Hobbs, Garrett Jacob Hobbs, Alana Bloom, Original Characters, Molly Graham, Barney Matthews
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by meraki_arcane

Summary

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AU where Will is a tattoo shop owner and Hannibal is the head of a mafia group.

Will has spent his life keeping his head low in the city of Baltimore. He'd worked hard to remain neutral, incurring no wrath and earning no one's interest. Until Will is heading to his tattoo shop one day and saves a kid who was going to be shot. Too bad the kid is mafia affiliated, and not just any mafia. The biggest, most dangerous group in the city of Baltimore: the Ripper Mafia. And worse, he's piqued the interest of the leader, the Chesapeake Ripper.

Notes

Yes, this is my first attempt at fanfic. No, I had no idea what I was doing. It just kinda wrote itself out all lovely like. Any helpful comments or tips would be much appreciated. Other than that, I hope you enjoy this trip down a rabbit hole.
No beta read.

Just A Tattooist

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Will ran down the sidewalk, scowling at the rapidly setting sun. It seemed hellbent on sending him to an early grave. He'd told Jack that he needed to be off before dark when he'd first applied at working for the dingy diner Royale. Getting to his tattoo parlor after his day job being a waiter had proven dangerous. His shop was unfortunately located in a more seedy area of the city. Once the sun set, walking alone in that area was asking to get shot or worse.

Not that there was a "safe" area in the city. Not with the mafia running it.

Which was why Will had made an agreement with Jack for his shift to end before dark before he'd been hired. Instead of honoring their agreement, Jack was in the habit of letting him off later and later nowadays. With a constant firing and rehiring of employees, the diner was regularly short staffed. Jack always needed people to cover shifts or stay longer to show the newbies the ropes.

Will's phone buzzed in his pocket.

Fishing it out, he saw the shop's number. Frowning, he glanced up long enough to make sure a car wasn't coming as he crossed the road before answering. "What?"

"Where are you, Boss?" Freddie asked, popping her gum right in the receiver, making Will grit his teeth. While she called him boss, it was always in a mocking tone, drawing out the word like the title sounded weird coming out of her mouth in relation to him. "Bev is getting pretty worried. She's asked me like five times if you'd come in yet. Since she's antsy, it's making everyone else here antsy. It's annoying as hell."

"First off," Will said, trying to get his temper under control. He couldn't fire her, no matter how much she rankled his nerves. She'd proven a decent secretary, even if she was one of the nosiest people he'd ever hired. "Spit the damn gum out. You know the shop's policy." He paused, listening to the gum hitting the metal trash can that sat under the front desk before continuing, "Second, tell Bev to calm her ass down and do her job. I'll be there in less than five minutes."

While Will understood why she was worried, they both knew he'd be fine, regardless of what the past said. He knew that after the sun set, it was every man for himself. Even during the day, you stood at least a fifty percent chance of getting shanked depending on where you walked. But Will had spent the majority of his life in this godforsaken city. He knew how to handle himself.

"Fuck, fine. I'll pass the message," Freddie said, disgust curling around her words. Will could hear her long manicured nails clicking as she typed on the shop's computer. She was probably gambling online. He'd already caught her two other times doing it during her shift hours.

Will fought not to snarl into the phone. Swallowing the urge, he cleared his throat before saying softly, "If you want to keep your job, Freddie, and pay off those debts, I suggest you drop the attitude and do as you're told."

The clicking on the other end of the line paused as the threat sank in. They both knew he wouldn't fire her unless she pushed it. Finding decent secretaries had proven difficult enough that he hesitated firing her, no matter how much he wanted to. The last one had tried to steal from him. The one before that, due to various reasons, had to be let go after only being there after four days. It'd gotten bad enough he had a long, and quickly growing, "Don't Rehire" list taped to the back of his office door. He didn't want to think about trying to find another if he fired Freddie.

Before she could point that out though, Will hung up. He wasn't feeling up to arguing with her anorexic corpse.

The difficulty of finding good hires was the only reason he put up with Jack's bullshit of hire-fire habit. He'd done enough hiring and turning around just to fire them. There were just too many wanna-be criminals in this city. Any one who didn't want to end up in crime moved away. If they never managed to move, they eventually became like the rest of the people here.

Will was proof of that.

He'd been born in the bayous of Louisiana. But his mother had grown up here before moving away for school. When he was ten, she'd talked his dad into moving back to Baltimore. She then turned around, got hooked on pills, and disappeared one night in the span of a year. But not before saddling his dad with a boatload of debt. He'd been trying to move back to Louisiana till that point. Instead, he found himself working himself to the bone to pay back the debts of both his tattoo shop and his wife. Will had found no food in his house more times than not while growing up. And he'd found himself working there by twelve and tattooing by fourteen. Now just under thirty, he had a regular clientele and a growing business.

Will enforced a few hard rules after taking over. One was that the shop didn't care who walked through the door. Regardless of their background or appearance, as long as they could pay, they could get a tattoo or piercing at his shop.

The second was the no-question policy. Unless it had to do with the tattoo or piercing the customer had come in asking for, no other questions were permitted from his employees. It was even strongly recommended to the clients not to discuss much more than the weather and pets with the workers. Having too much information was just as bad as pissing off the wrong person for turning them away. So, they gave the person what they asked for and then showed them to the front door. And sometimes the back.

His dad had been the one to implement the no-question rule, but Will had been the one to make it a hard rule after his dad died. He didn't want to give the mafia any reason to come snooping around his shop. Or a reason to burn it down.

When he'd first inherited the shop, there'd been some problems. His reluctance to meet eyes and dislike for social interactions made some think they could disregard his rules. As if he was a shy kid who could be bullied into rolling over. So, he'd proven a point. After that, it had been relatively smooth sailing.

He didn't know what he'd do if he lost the shop. By this point in his life, he wasn't sure what else he'd do. All his life was spent in the shop. Cleaning, bookkeeping, tattooing. Will had only recently picked up the job being a waiter. For several reasons. But, all of his skills were meant for his shop. Not for writing papers or sitting behind an office desk from seven to five. He'd honed his pure empathy in particular for the benefit of the shop. It'd just take a glance at a customer for him to know how much danger they posed to his life. If they proved dangerous enough, he'd take it personally. Or let Bev take it. He could trust her to be able to deal with the situation.

Besides, even when Will wanted to go to college to do something else with his life, he'd found that door quickly slammed in his face. The only colleges here were built for the elite and super rich. There was no way he could afford to go to any of them. Not that they'd let a gutter rat like him in. And, he couldn't afford to move away. He didn't have the funds and he couldn't leave his dad either. In the end, he hadn't had much of a choice in what he did after he made it through high school.

Anger simmered low in his gut at the thought. Even years after, he wanted to rant about how fucked up it all was. No one in his shop talked about it. They all knew it was a taboo subject.

Shaking his head, Will shoved the thoughts away. There was no point in getting worked up about it. Nothing would change the facts and there was no point in wasting time on wishful thinking. Or energy in getting mad about it.

Another glance at the quickly disappearing sun had Will picking up his pace till he was half jogging down the sidewalk, sidestepping other pedestrians. There weren't many out. Not this close to dark and not in this area. Sweat soaked his back, even after removing his plaid jacket and tying it around his waist. He hadn't expected the temp to raise so much during the day. Now his black tee was sticking to him as his backpack bounced against his back.

He was in such a hurry, Will almost missed it. And even when he did realize what he was hearing, he should have kept going. Nothing good ever came from helping someone. Usually, someone you thought needed help was just waiting for an opening to rob you. But, instead, he found himself slowing, feet turning in the direction of the sound of a crying child. He still had a bleeding heart after all.

Marching head long into what was probably hell, he moved into the alleyway the noise was coming from and took stock of the situation.

Two large, ham-handed men in suits loomed over a little girl. She was crouched by a pile of trash, with her head tucked between her legs and her arms lifted to cover it. Her dark hair was frizzy and tangled, pulled to the side in a low ponytail, like someone had grabbed it and yanked.

One of the suits had a Glock pulled, aiming it straight at the child.

Hot, white rage tore through Will, tinting everything an ugly shade of red. He reached behind him even as his feet moved him forward before he could think.

"Hey!"

His yell echoed in the cramped space. It had the desired response, with the gun swung up away from the girl to point at Will's chest. But Will had already pulled his own trigger.

His pistol fired twice in quick succession, deafening him and pulling a scream from the girl.

He kept it tucked in its holster in the back of his jeans, hidden under an oversized jacket or shirt or under his backpack. It was the only birthday gift his mother had given him and it was right before she disappeared.

"Old enough to attract attention, old enough to carry," she'd said as she handed it to him before popping another handful of pills. For a while after she left, he'd refused to carry it. But after a rather nasty interaction with a longtime and regular customer, he never went without it. Spent four days a week under his shop practicing.

The gun was tucked away and Will was in front of the kid, blocking the view of the two men with a bullet hole in their foreheads, before they'd hit the ground. The force of the shot had sent blood and brain matter dotting the concrete. She didn't need to see that. Will didn't need to see it. He knew he'd pay for it later when he tried to sleep.

Bending over, Will tried to ignore the way the girl flinched away as he grabbed her and gently pulled her to her feet. She barely came up to his hip. And she was skinnier than he was, which was saying something since even now he was in the unfortunate habit of missing meals.

She never raised her head, but Will could see bruising beginning to appear on her cheek. That and bruises and scrapes covered every inch of her exposed skin. Even through the dirt and garbage grime, he could see the darkening patches appearing on her pale skin. Blood was staining what looked to be a very expensive dress. She only had one shoe, but will knew handcrafted leather when he saw it. Whoever she was, she was a long way from wherever she's supposed to be.

The smell of piss and trash wafted off her. And iron. He wondered how long she'd been with the suits before he'd found her.

Gentling his voice, Will kept his tone soft when he addressed her. "Hey, sweetheart. What's your name?"

She didn't respond. Instead, she tucked her head further down, her hands coming back up to start wrapping around her head again.

Acid filled Will's gut as he watched the action, and he quickly interceded it. He couldn't stand the idea of someone hurting her. Or any kid. It made him wish he hadn't killed the suits so quickly. He would have savored taking his time inflicting the same pain and fear they had inflicted on her.

"Come on darling, work with me here. What's your name?" Will asked again, keeping his voice soft.

No response. Her body curled in, like she wanted to disappear. A whimper left her, twisting his heart.

"Hey, hey," Will said, shushing her, trying to sooth her. "Listen, I'm not going to hurt you, okay? I just want to help, yeah? So what's your name? Where you from?"

Again nothing.

Kneeling down, Will moved till he got his head under her's, forcing himself to find her gaze. He had to peer through the stray locks of hair to catch it. She had light blue eyes, different from his own blue-grey eyes. Instead, they were like the color of a warm sea. Blue and green tossed together.

Seeing he had her attention, he grinned at her, wiggling his eyebrows. "There are those peepers. Pretty ones at that."

That got him a blink, her head slowly raising till he didn't have to bend to see her face.

"Nice to meet you, sweetheart. I'm Will. Or William if you'd rather, though my dad was the only one who ever called me that. Most just call me Will, or Mister, or Boss from some of my

employees." See the kid begin to shrink away again, Will shook his head, making shushing noises again. "Not that kinda boss, darlin. I own a tattoo shop, the Wolf Trap. Named after the place my dad grew up. It's just around the corner actually," Will said, pointing out to the street.

The girl looked skeptical, so Will lifted the edge of his tee so she could see the right side of his ribcage, where the image of a ship wheel acting like a compass that was smaller than his palm was inked, a date scrawled under it.

"See?" he said, dropping his shirt and tilting his head to the side. Reaching up, he pushed his wild curls back to expose the piercings that lined the cartilage of his ear. "Just a good samaritan tattooist."

Gradually, the little girl reached up to run a finger over the earrings. Her skin was icy despite the heat.

When her hand dropped, Will dropped his hair and turned to grin at her. "Pretty cool right?"

She hesitated a moment, her eyes darting around, before giving a shy nod.

Tilting his head, Will asked, "You know where your parents are at?"

A firm shake of her head was no surprise to Will.

"You know where you're at?"

No.

"You got a phone?"

No. He figured that one had been a long shot given the circumstances he'd found her in, but there'd been no harm in asking either.

"You know your parent's number?"

That finally got him a short nod.

Sighing, Will slipped his jacket off and bundled her up before picking her up and propping her on his hip. The alarmed look that flashed across her face had him patting her back, trying to keep her from screaming or freaking out. "Easy there. It just means that you need to come with me to use my shop's phone is all. Can't leave you all alone, now can I?"

He didn't offer his phone. There was no telling who she'd call and he didn't have any desire for a stranger to have his number. The shop's phone was a public number, so he saw no harm in letting her use it to call her guardian. They could be anyone from a forgetful grandma, to a knee-deep in shit mafia member. The thought of getting involved with the mafia because of this made Will frown. He didn't regret helping her, but he wasn't going to be grateful for the headache that was bound to come.

She eyed him warily, her bottom lip disappearing as she chewed on it. Will waited till she nodded in agreement before heading back to the mouth of the alley. He wanted her to know that he'd listen to her. That he meant her no harm.

"Don't worry," Will said as they left the alley. "You'll love my shop. It's warm and quirky, like me." That got him a small smile. "And I have a dog, Winston. He hangs out at my shop during the day and sleeps next to my bed at home. He's a good boy. He'll love to give you kisses."

Will rambled on, attempting to distract the girl. He tried not to flinch when she bent forward to tuck her head against his neck, her fingers reaching up to tangle in his curls. He wasn't used to so much human contact. Even at the shop, he always wore gloves and it was always professional. Bev was the only one who regularly touched him, and even then, it wasn't often. She knew Will wasn't overly fond of physical contact.

"If your parent doesn't pick up, I'll give you a piercing on the house. For all your trouble," Will said, letting his fingers card through her hair.

That got him a soft giggle. If her head hadn't been right next to his ear, he'd have missed it. It was light, like bells. He couldn't stop the smile that spread across his face.

He was only half joking. A part of him wanted to teach her parent a lesson. To show just how dangerous it was to be negligent. Anything could happen in an instant, and she'd clearly been missing for a lot longer than that.

Will let the desire roll around for a bit. If it was an old lady, she probably wouldn't even notice till later. If it was a mafia member, he'd probably get shot. If they cared at all. And, if on the off chance it was one of the elite, he'd probably get sued for it.

Huffing a sigh, he let the idea go. The last thing he needed was to attract the wrong kind of attention.

~TBC~

The Phone Call

Chapter Summary

Will makes a phone call. Bev and Winston are there.

Chapter Notes

Yes, Winston is there. Why? Because I like animals, especially Winston. That's really the only reason.

Not beta read.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It took just under eight minutes before they made it to the *Wolf Trap* . Will had walked slower than he usually did. He was trying not to jostle the little girl, fearing it'd cause her more pain. She was already in enough.

It wasn't a big store, with large glass windows for the front. On the glass, a buddy of his had painted a silhouette of a running wolf, with his store's name in the middle of it. Simple, but still artful. Will's apartment sat right above his store, three small, curtained windows facing the road the only evidence of his residence. His dad had bought both floors when he'd first purchased the property. He'd planned on renting it out to employees till they'd been evicted from their own home.

The open sign hangs crooked in the door, with the "O" light out and the rest flickering. He kept meaning to get it fixed, but never remembered to do it when he had a chance. He can see people in the waiting room, filling all the seats, and all looking down at their phone. He doesn't bother waiting for someone to see him and open the door. Instead, he turned, using his back to open it, yelling before he was even in.

"BEV!"

His shout startled both the patrons waiting and the kid. She jerked, fingers yanking painfully in his hair, head snapping up to take in the shop. Her eyes flicked around, taking in the artwork of dogs that covered the dark blue walls and emerald carpets. There were also random statues of dogs all over. On the windowsills, under some of the waiting seats, on top of the front desk. They varied in shape, color, and material. The life sized, wooden Great Dane that sat next to the front door fascinated her.

Freddie had been sitting at the front desk, her purple stilettoed feet propped up. When Will had barrelled in, she was in such a rush to get them off before he saw, her rolly chair slid right out from under her. She landed hard on the floor with a squawk. It was all flying red curls, the bottom of colorful heels, and then nothing.

Not that Will would have seen, even if she had never bothered to remove her feet. He was distracted by Winston who'd shot out from one of the private rooms, rather than his office, where he should have been. Winston barked in greeting as he ran around Will's feet, sniffing at the small child, giving tentative licks against her exposed leg in welcome.

"Bev, get your ass out here," Will yelled again, lifting a hand and giving Winston the command to sit. Who did so, albeit grudgingly, since it meant he couldn't keep giving kisses to the newcomer.

"I already am, if you'd been paying attention instead of bellowing like a blowhard."

Turning a baleful eye at the sarcasm, he found the fit Asian woman leaning with her arms crossed against the doorway of the room Winston had exited. She was grinning at him, cocking an eyebrow in question to the load in his arms. Her blue and red triangle patterned zip-up almost blinded Will. While he'd readily admit that he didn't really have a sense of style, he thought Bev's sense of style was even worse.

At her pointed look, the weight of the gazes of the other people became like a brand against Will's skin. He wanted to bark at them to mind their own damn business. Refusing to give an explanation in earshot of so many people, especially Freddie, Will said, "Get me the first aid and the shop phone."

"What, no please?" Bev asked in a parting shot as she pushed off the doorframe and went back in the room.

"Only if you get rid of that monstrosity of a jacket."

The door slammed shut before he'd finished. This had been an ongoing war between them about the other's choice in clothing. She couldn't stand he wore plaid religiously, and her "vibrant" clothes, as she put it, drove him crazy.

But even with the door shut, he knew she'd heard him. Will's dad had made sure all the walls were thin enough that anything above a normal volume could be heard from the outside. This was to protect his employees from violent clients, as well as to prevent sex from happening. It had been a fairly big problem before. And even then, sometimes his employees and clients just didn't give a flying fuck if he heard them going at it like rabid rabbits.

Will huffed, with no heat behind it, as he moved past Bev's room, heading straight for his office. Winston was instantly up from his sit and following close on his heels, trying to nose the girls feet. Bev had been at the shop for as long as he could remember. She was his best friend and closest thing he had to family by this point. She was allowed to give him shit.

His office was at the end of the hall, directly down from the entrance. Meaning he had to regularly pass the private rooms. He could hear Price and Zeller, his two other employees,

yelling through the walls, asking what the hell was going on. They were almost as bad as Freddie in their need to know what was going on. But, their worst trait wasn't their nosiness. It was their incessant bickering with one another. Harmless, even while it was annoying. But, Bev enjoyed it. She kept a running talleyboard on a whiteboard about who won each argument in the waiting room. Right now, Zeller was up by two. She also had a scoreboard going on their argument about each other's choice in attire, but Will never looked at it. The one putting up the tallies was biased.

His office was a cramped little box, just big enough for his desk and two chairs. Slipping inside, Will let Winston in before shutting it and depositing the kid into the guest chair. He let her look about while he moved around his beat up desk. It was ancient. It'd been dug out of the junkyard. As had the two chairs. He and his father had spent hours crawling through all the stuff trying to find something suitable, and ended up with a scrawny wooden desk. They were lucky to find a desk that worked. Or sort of worked. None of the drawers liked to open. And one of Will's old textbooks had been shoved under one of the legs to keep it from wobbling.

As for the two chairs, the guest chair that the kid sat on leaned a little to the left. But, Will figured if it could hold grown men, a small child had nothing to fear. As for his own rolly chair, it had an unfortunate habit of slowly sinking down till he found his nose at desk level. No matter how many times he'd tried to fix the damn thing, it continued to slowly sink.

Clients often heard cursing coming from his office because of it.

Will pulled out his gun, setting it on the desk, and tossed his backpack in the corner. He settled in said chair, resting his arms against his desk while he observed the kid who was looking around his office. She was still bundled in his plaid coat. It swallowed her so just her feet could be seen swinging back and forth. Her ponytail was barely hanging on to the end of her hair by the point, many locks having already broken free. Will also noted that she did not have her ears pierced. Winston, in the meantime, had lapped the room twice already. He paused briefly next to the girl, giving her a sniff, which got him a gentle pet for his trouble. Satisfied that she posed no threat to his human, Winston walked back around the desk. He wiggled his way under it right in front of Will's feet where his dog bed was laying.

Will felt safe watching her since her attention rested on the only wall decoration. A rather abhorrent painting of a ship at sea. Bev regularly told him how terrible the picture was and that he should replace it. She even expressed on several occasions how she couldn't believe he'd actually spent money on it. He'd never been able to tell her that he hadn't paid anything for it, since he was the one who painted it. He'd made the mistake in assuming because he could create art with a needle, then it would easily transfer to a paintbrush.

The permanently crooked ship proved otherwise.

They were silent a moment, till Will felt he needed to say something. He wasn't used to dealing with kids. He certainly didn't know what to do with this one. "Not very impressive right?" he said, leaning back in his chair. "But, hey, it's mine, so it's fine."

She didn't respond, her attention turning to the tall lamps that sat behind Will's desk. The only lighting in here. It was probably the poor lighting that had led to him needing glasses

when he did his paperwork. Too dark with too small of text.

Huffing, Will bent down to jerk open the bottom drawer of his desk. It opened, but let out a horrendous screech in protest, scaring the girl. He gave her a grimace in apology but pulled out his prize. A bottle of cheap whiskey and a coffee cup.

Pouring himself a generous amount, Will took a large swig. The girl was looking at him now, and he was steadily looking at her collar. There was an ugly looking bruise peeking out from under the edge of her dress. He was also debating how much of a shit show he just dropped himself in. With how he found her, he was guessing at least thigh deep.

At least enough that he worried about his shop ending up on fire.

Groaning, he set his coffee cup on his desk, rolling his neck so it popped. Catching her curiosity, Will pointed a finger at her and said, “I swear darlin, so help me if helping me ends with me having to deal with an arsonist, I’m going to use you as free labor from then till the day I day.” Lifting his cup, he took another drink of his whiskey, pausing long enough to mutter, “Though, that might be sooner now.”

They lapsed back into silence till a soft knock on the door sent the girl rushing from her seat.

She darted to Will, the arms of his jacket flapping behind her like butterfly wings. It took her a few times before she climbed successfully into his lap, his jacket working hard to impede her. Winston, on the other hand, barely moved. He gave a half hearted bark but didn’t trouble himself with getting up from his comfy spot. He knew it was Bev before she opened the door.

Bev poked her head in, grinning broadly when she saw the bundle that had climbed Will like a jungle gym.

“I see you got yourself another stray. How many does that make now? Eight? Your landlord is going to kick you out Will,” Bev said as she slipped in, quietly shutting the door behind her.

Will snorted, shaking his head, his curls bouncing at the motion. “Hardly a stray. Much too adorable. And I am my own landlord.”

“Hey, Winston’s adorable.”

Winston’s tail thumped at the sound of his name, lifting his head to give Will a beseeching look. He was adorable. A chubby adorable since Bev liked to sneak him treats when his back was turned. He’d have to start him on a diet soon if she increased the amount she gave him any more.

Reaching down, Will rubbed his silky ears briefly as he said, “And I only have five dogs.”

“Oh I know,” Bev said, unashamed in her needling, as she moved around the desk to kneel in front of Will and the kid. Her nose wrinkled a little at the smell of piss and trash, but she didn’t comment on either. “But, it’s not like you wouldn’t have eight dogs either.”

Will chuckled. She wasn't wrong. At one point, he'd picked up over twelve dogs and was hoarding them in his cramped apartment. Even with consistent training, they had barked at all hours of the day, disrupting things in his shop. Bev had stepped in and found a home for almost all of them.

Bev handed him the phone as she set the first aid kit down. Opening it, there was a slapdash of items. From gauze to pain meds to stitching supplies. Over time, more things had been added as they'd been needed. Even burn ointment had been added at one point after a crazy older lady had barrelled in to dump a kettle of boiling water on her husband who was in the middle of a large back tattoo. Will still had no idea how she'd gotten that kettle from her home to his store, but he banned both from ever coming within a hundred yards of his store. Zeller still carried the scars from the incident.

Bev evaluated the damage on the kid, being as gentle as possible as she handled her arms and legs. When she reached down to start pulling stuff out of the kit, she asked, "So, where'd you get her?"

"An alley." The look he got from Bev had him giving a little more. "She was about to get shot, so I stepped in."

Bev paused, lifting her head so look at him as Will ran his fingers over the phone buttons, studying the back of the kids head. Her lips pursed as her gaze flicked between him and the kid. "She connected to the mafia?"

Will gave a half shoulder shrug. The two suits were definitely mafia affiliated, but he wasn't sure about the kid. She was a little young, but if her parents were in the mafia, that would complicate things. Avoiding all business and interaction with the mafia was the best course of action, but living in this city, most people had some dealings with them. While Will had managed to keep clean, he still had members coming into his shop for service.

The most well known and regular mafia member was Abel Gideon. Will always took care of him when he came in. Bev could take care of herself, but the man, while always polite and soft spoken, gave off the vibe of being the majority of the way to crazy. Will never said anything during their appointments other than professional questions. Otherwise, he left Gideon to do the talking. He preferred to talk about his family most of the time.

Keep your head down and nose clean. That's what his dad had always said to him after a member left their shop. He'd beaten it into Will not to join. His dad had never wanted him to remain here. And at one point, he had been part of the mafia for a short time when they first moved here, but gotten out. He never told Will why he got in or how he got out.

Will had agreed. When he was younger, he didn't care one way or another. In the end, his dad didn't want him joining and he didn't have time to even really consider joining. It was all taken up with either school or the shop. Now, he'd started his own gang to be interested in joining any other. But his was a mismatched family, rather than a mafia group.

It was small, consisting mostly of his employees. Bev, Zeller, and Price. They all had a tattoo of a howling wolf head, all sharp lines and geometrical shapes, somewhere on their body. Will's was located on his shoulder blade, opposite of his anchor tattoo. He'd gone first, with

Bev being the one to ink him, after he'd approved of the final design. He'd done everyone else's after that.

At one point, he had considered extending an invitation to their previous piercer: Alana Bloom. Bev had been firmly against it. She and Alana never fought, but Bev also didn't really like the former employee.

"She's manipulative," Bev had said scowling one late night in his office. They'd been up for hours drinking his whiskey with Will trying to check the books. When he pointed out the fact that they were all manipulative to some extent, she'd said, "And she's gonna leave Will. Just watch. She's a hummingbird." At his questioning look, she'd elaborated. "Pretty and small. Here one second, gone the next."

Bev turned out to be right. Alana was his piercer for five years before she got the scholarship for one of the colleges in the city. She said she wanted to do more with her life than shove needles in people. It was probably why she rejected him when he tried asking her out once, right before she left. She'd been kind, but firm in her refusal. After that, Will decided not to invite her into his 'family.' It would have only tied her down.

It was that, or she'd refused because he came with a host of issues that no one really wanted to deal with. Not even Will. Now, they only saw her on Friday night when they went to their dive bar for their weekly drinks.

Freddie, unfortunately, knew about the tattoos, but she'd yet to figure out their meaning. She knew that Price and Will had the same tattoo. Price's wolf was located on his forearm, and Freddie had walked in on Will changing his shirt one day. She wasn't stupid. She knew they meant something and now she'd made it her goal to find out what.

She badgered Price about his recently. He was more than fed up with her poking around. "Do something about Will, before I do," Jimmy had growled one day, cornering Will in his office, looking particularly haggard because of Freddie. "I'm serious. You better do something or I'm going to stick my tattoo gun through her damn eye."

Will wouldn't be upset with that outcome, but he'd be back on the hunt for a secretary, so he'd agreed to have a talk with Freddie. The only problem was he knew the more he ordered her to stop digging, the more she'd lock on and refuse to let it go. She'd just get sneakier about it. He'd rather her being doing it openly, where he could keep an eye on her, than have to worry about her doing something underhanded.

"Will, you've worked hard to keep this shop and yourself clean of that kinda thing." Bev's words drew his attention out of his musing and back to the problem at hand. He still hadn't done anything with Freddie, but she was bothering Price less. Still a problem, but the kid took precedent.

Sighing, he rubbed his eyes, refusing to look at Bev. "I know. Trust me, I'm well aware of where this could land us."

He could hear Bev shifting her weight, feel her debating something, but in the end she said, "Look, we should get her cleaned up before I try cleaning her wounds. Seems stupid to give

her first aid when she'd covered in who-knows-what." Her lips pulled down when she saw the gunk covering her hands. Will would probably need to pitch his jacket after this.

Will dropped his hand, glancing to his friend and then down to the girl. She was right. "Yeah, you should take her to the bathroom. But first," Will said, moving to grab a pen and sticky note. He turned to the kid who'd twisted to look up at him, holding them out to her. "You need to write down the number of your parents for me darlin."

Gingerly, the kid took them from him, looking at him for a few seconds before bending over the desk to write it. She paused after writing the first number, her bottom lip disappearing as she chewed it. After a moment, she wrote a second number. Whoever belonged to the second number, it was clear she wasn't sure if she should write their number. There was anxiety on her face about the owner. But no fear. It piqued Will's interest.

"Okay, sweety," Bev said after the kid had put the pen down. "Let's get you cleaned up." When Bev reached for her though, the kid shied away, reaching back to twist her fingers in Will's tee. She buried her face against his shirt, unsure about the woman.

Huffing a laugh, Will detached her hands, choosing to study them rather than look her in the eye. "Easy there. This is Bev, my good friend—"

"His best friend."

"My best friend from my childhood—"

"His teenage years."

"My best friend from my teenage years who won't be for much longer if she keeps interrupting me," Will said, giving her a hard look, though it had no heat in it. She gave him a cheeky grin. "But, she's going to take real good care of you, m'kay? She's gonna help you get all that grime and shit off you."

"Language, Will. She's like five."

Giving his friend a flat look, he took a deep breath, turning back to the kid. "She's going to take you to the bathroom, help you clean up, and by the time you get back I'll have already contacted your parents and they'll be headed our way." Hopefully. He'd really hate to end up having to tell her that he couldn't get a hold of anyone or that they weren't going to bother to come get her. He didn't know what he was going to do with her if that happened.

The kid looked at Will, chewing her lip again. Bev gave her an encouraging nod when she looked back to her, eyeing the hand Bev held out. Nerves radiated off her, but it wasn't the same it had been when he'd found her in the alley. Anxious, not terrified. She didn't know what she should do in this situation but she wasn't afraid of what they might do to her. She was good at reading people, Will realized with a jolt of surprise, and she read them and concluded they wouldn't hurt her. Similar to what he did, but also vastly different. Eventually, she took Bev's hand and slid off Will's lap.

He waited till they were gone before dialing the first number on the sticky note.

It went straight to voicemail. No personal voicemail either, just the typical “the person you are trying to call is not available” bullshit. Frowning, Will tried again with the same result. After the fourth attempt with no change, he gave up. Whoever he was trying to call had their phone off.

He eyed the second number, mulling over the girl’s reaction. He got the feeling that he’d regret making the phone call, and his feelings were usually right. But the other number had been a crapshoot. And he promised that he’d have called her parents by the time she got back.

Running a hand through his hair, he dialed the number and waited as it rang.

It rang three times, and then someone picked up.

“Hello?”

The voice was male, deep, with a hint of a foriegn accent Will couldn’t place curling around the letters. Handsome. That’s all Will could think when he heard the voice. No, closer to alluring, rather than handsome. Soft, and comforting. It was the kind of voice that could lull you to sleep as you listened to them read. Will couldn’t stop the slight shiver that worked its way down his spine.

“Hello?” the man on the other end prompted again.

Will realized he didn’t respond the first time, too busy thinking about his voice, and a harsh flush crawled up his face. Clearing his throat, he said, “Um, yes, hello.”

There was a pause, like the stranger was trying to figure out what was going on. Then they said, “I’m sorry, but is there something I can help you with?”

The red worked its way further up Will’s face, coloring his ears now, as he said, “Yeah—I mean, yes. At least I think so.” Taking a deep breath and berating himself for his stupidity, Will tried again. “I’m sorry to bother you sir, but I believe I have someone you’re probably looking for.”

Again, there was a pause. “I believe you have the wrong number, sir. I don’t have anyone I’m looking for at the moment.”

Will pinched the bridge of his nose. “I don’t think so. Sir, I’m Will, Will Graham, and I own a tattoo shop in the downtown area of Baltimore.”

“Nice to meet you Mr. Graham, I’m Hannibal Lecter. How can I help you?”

“Just Will. I feel like people are looking for my dad when they call me that.”

“Very well Will. How can I help you?”

“Mr. Lecter, I was coming into work today and I ran into a little girl who gave me your number when I asked who I could call.”

“Little girl?” Curiosity colored his tone, turning it from professional and polite, to more personal. “I’m afraid I have no children though.”

“Shit,” Will muttered, picking up his cup and finishing off his whiskey. Maybe she just wrote the number down wrong, but he worried she memorized it wrong. He’d never be able to get a hold of one of her parents at this rate.

“Excuse me?”

“No, sorry, that wasn’t meant for you,” Will said quickly, hearing the offense in the stranger's tone, quiet as it was. “I’m just a little at a loss. She gave me two numbers, and the first one kept going straight to voicemail.”

Silence lapsed as Will tried to figure out what to do next. He’d have to wait till the girl got back to ask her if she was sure that she’d give him the correct number.

“Who is the child?”

The question startled Will out of his thoughts. It took a moment for him to put together what Mr. Lecter had asked. “Don’t know. She hasn’t said a word since I met her.”

“And her appearance?”

“Small, between five and eight most likely. Dark brown hair, blue-green eyes. Has a tendency to bite her lip when she’s considering something.”

“Abigail.”

Will blinked at the name. The man had sighed her name, almost in relief. As though he had in fact been looking for her and was relieved that she was found.

“So you do know her.” Will tried to keep the accusation out of his voice, though he wasn’t very successful. Mr. Lecter had been so sure that he wasn’t looking for anyone, and Will had felt terrible. One, for interrupting Mr. Lecter’s day and two, for failing Abigail. In the end, it wasn’t him who’d made the mistake. Nor was it Abigail. “I thought you said you weren’t looking for anyone.”

Mr. Lecter cleared his voice, his tone back to professionally polite. “I apologize Will. I was not, in fact, looking for her, but her father has been for a few days.”

Will’s stomach twisted at the idea of Abigail having been in the hands of those suits for that long. There was no telling what horrors she’d endured or witnessed being trapped with them for that long. Will regretted having killed them so quickly.

Sensing Will’s shift in mood, Winston sat up and nudged his hand with his nose, licking him till he started petting him.

“Her father? If you aren’t her father, why did she give me your number?”

“That’s probably because her father is a close acquaintance of mine. She sees me regularly and has called me a few times for her father. It would explain why she remembered my number and had you contact me if you couldn’t get ahold of her father, Mr. Hobbs,” Mr. Lecter said. Something rustled in the background. Paper? Sounded like paper.

“Why would she know your number if her father is just an acquaintance of yours?” It didn’t make sense. Unease began to creep through Will.

There was a pause, like Mr. Lecter was debating something. Letting out a soft sigh, he said, “Mr. Hobbs is a patient of mine. I’m a doctor. A psychiatrist. He sees me biweekly.”

Will dropped the phone, face going sheet white as he fumbled for it. The last thing he needed in his life was another psychiatrist. He knew he’d regret making this call. Alana, though she was going to school for it, didn’t count. She hadn’t gotten her licensing yet, though she was sounding more and more like one. He’d already told her repeatedly not to psychoanalyze him.

“Will? Mr. Graham, are you there?”

“Sorry,” Will grunted, bringing the phone back up to his ear. He ignored the fact his hands were shaking. “Phone slipped. So, will you get a hold of her father and tell him where to pick her up or?”

More rustling on the other end of the phone line. Then the sound of a door shutting. “I’m afraid if you weren’t able to get in touch with Mr. Hobbs, I won’t be able to either. He’s probably out looking for her and forgot to charge his phone. However, I do know where he lives. I can pick Abigail up and take her home. If you will give me the address of your shop, I can be there shortly.”

Will hesitated. He didn’t like giving a psychiatrist his shop’s location. He’d had more than enough of those kinds of people and had worked hard keeping a low enough profile that he’d skirt under their attention. Bitter memories started to bubble up, but Will shook his head, like he could shake them away. There was no need to think about him.

“Will?”

“Yeah, uh, okay. It’s the *Wolf Trap* tattoo shop,” Will said, having no other choice but to rattle off his store’s address to Dr. Lecter. There was no way to politely tell the doctor to go fuck off a bridge, especially since the doctor hadn’t done anything to warrant it. But all psychiatrists left a bad taste in his mouth.

The doctor hummed. Will could hear him pursing his lips in thought. “It might take me longer than I originally thought. I’m afraid my practice is located on the other side of the city. I won’t arrive for close to an hour.”

Where the elite frequent is what he didn’t say. And he didn’t need to. It was no surprise. Will figured the girl was from a well off family based off her clothes, though he didn’t recognize the name Hobbs. “That’s not a problem. We’re open till late.”

“Very well. I’ll be seeing you soon,” Dr. Lecter said. Will hummed in confirmation, muttered something about seeing him and hung up before anything else could be said.

He looked down at the phone, his brows pinched and a grimace twisting his lips. A psychiatrist. Why did it have to be a damn psychiatrist? He’d have rather it been a mafia member. He’d even take a mafia boss over one of those snakes.

Will groaned, leaning forward till his head hit the desk with a thump. Winston stood at the sound and started nosing him. At least *Dr. Lecter* would be old and ugly, no matter how attractive he sounded on the phone. They were all ugly, even if they weren’t that old. He’d never met one that wasn’t.

The door opened, and there was pause.

“Will, you good?”

He gave another groan to Bev in answer. He wished they had been anything but a psychiatrist.

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so he doesn't like psychiatrists. But, what about a psychiatrist/doctor/mafia boss/serial killer/cannibal?

Dr. Hannibal Lecter

Chapter Summary

The good doctor insists on meeting the unsociable tattooist and Freddie insists on being nosy.

Chapter Notes

Thought I was dead, didntchya. Ha. Me too. Alas, the grim reaper doesn't want me yet. So another chapter you get.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will turned out to be wrong.

While Dr. Lecter was older than him, he was by no means old. He had to be only a handful of years older than Will, with only a few telltale wrinkles near the corner of his eyes. He certainly wasn't the old wrinkled potato Will had been imagining, with a trimmed goatee and balding head, as he waited for the doctor to arrive.

And what was worse, Dr. Lecter was undeniably and irrefutably attractive.

Not in the classical sense that people usually think of as attractive, though there were elements of it. To be classically attractive would be too superficial. Too simple. It was more than that. It was more than the elegance that seemed imbued in his movements and manners. More than the sharp three piece suit of deep blue and Italian leather shoes. More than his features which were distinct and refined, almost like they'd been chiseled from stone. When Will saw Dr. Lecter, he saw something more, something deeper. But he wasn't sure what he saw yet.

All he knew for sure was that the doctor was captivating. For more reasons than his looks.

Will had tried so hard to avoid meeting him. After the phone call, he asked Bev to handle the doctor when he came in. Knowing his past, she'd agreed without much fuss. He could trust her to keep the kid safe. If she felt something was off, she'd haul ass out of there with the kid in tow. Her instincts of people, while not as good as Will's, were still impressive.

Will had started paperwork in the hour it took for the man to arrive. He figured it would be an acceptable excuse as to why he couldn't meet Dr. Lecter personally.

Unfortunately, the good doctor was rather insistent on meeting Will.

Which is how he ended up staring up at the doctor who stood in his office with Abigail attached to his leg.The child had wrapped herself around him the moment he'd walked through the doors. It assuaged some of Will's doubts about the doctor seeing the girl so attached to him.

Freddie stood right behind the pair, her gaze cataloging the emotions that crossed Will's face, and Bev was just outside the room. The space was too small to fit all five of them. And the doctor seemed to take up more space than possible. There was something about him that made him feel larger.

"Hello Will."

Dr. Lecter's voice was just as soft as it was on the phone. Just as dark and sensual. But there was nothing weak about it. It held a note of authority. Probably came from being a doctor.

Will rubbed his eyes, lifting his glasses to set them on the desk. Next to his gun. Too late to hide it by this point. Leaving it where it sat, he looked at Dr. Lecter, eyes lifting no higher than his tie. Blood red and paisley. "And you must be Dr. Lecter," Will said, leaning back in his chair to appear relaxed. The movement was felt silly since the desk edge was now to his chest.

Feeling ridiculous with his knees almost to his chin, Will stood, bending over to raise the chair as he waved a hand haphazardly to the piles of papers stacked around his desk. "As you can see, I'm a bit behind on paperwork." Most of it was actually done, but the doctor didn't know that.

Dr. Lecter hummed in agreement, turning to take in the small office. A quick glance to his lips that pulled slightly down told Will how unimpressed the doctor was with it. Will could easily imagine how different their work spaces looked. His was probably elegant and massive, with fancy modern artwork and weird trinkets.

"Still," Dr. Lecter said as he appraised the room, "I wanted to thank you personally for finding Abigail. As a close supporter to both of them, I am extremely grateful to you. Mr. Hobbs has been quite concerned about her."

Will snorted. "As he should be considering how I found her."

The doctor paused, turning back to the tattooist, but Will was staring studiously at his painting which the doctor had just been evaluating. It was one of the most horrendous pieces of artwork the man had probably ever laid eyes on based on his attire. Will had to fight the chuckle that was building in his chest at the disgust the doctor likely felt towards such an artistic atrocity.

But it wasn't only his attention Will could feel. Freddie's was a heavy hand against him. He could almost taste her hunger. That was enough to kill his growing humor.

Casting a quick glance to her, and then to Bev, he said, “Freddie, you can go back to the desk. Bev, why don’t you show Abigail your portfolio of tattoo designs. I’m sure this won’t take long.”

Even with Will staring down at the papers strewn across his desk, there was no mistaking the order behind the words. Bev was quick to reach for Abigail, prying her off the doctor’s leg with his help, and walking out the door. But Freddie hesitated. Will lifted his sight to her shoes, watching as they turned to point toward him. She clearly had no interest in missing out on this conversation.

Will lifted his gaze to look right by her ear. “Is there something else Freddie?”

The red head paused, not saying anything, but not leaving either. Too long. Will’s waning patient gave out almost all the way. Straightening out of his usual hunched position, he shifted his gaze so he looked her in the eye. She froze, mouth tugging into a tight line.

He never liked looking people in the eye, but Freddie especially made him feel oily. Like he’d waded through grease. Her avarice clung to him long after. Her perverse desires of obtaining what she wanted, regardless of what boundaries she crossed in order to get there, had a habit of lingering long after. She had no lines she wouldn’t cross for her own gain or self preservation.

“Freddie. Was there something else?”

Something in his tone had her backing to the door, pasting on that saccharine smile. “Nope, all good Boss. Just wanted to make sure Dr. Lecter didn’t need anything else.” Her gaze darted to the back of the doctor, like she could will him into letting her stay a little longer.

Dr. Lecter aimed to disappoint. He twisted, his lips quirking up in the corner, as he said, “Thank you Ms. Lounds, but that won’t be necessary. I’m sure Will can help me with anything else I might need.”

Bobbing her head, Freddie stepped out and shut the door quietly behind her. Will waited till he could hear the clack of her heels headed back towards the front.

Turning back to the doctor, he found that Dr. Lecter’s attention was all on him. Trying to shrug off the nerves, Will gestured to the seat as he took his own. “Have a seat please.”

The doctor did, unbuttoning his jacket as he did so, crossing an ankle over his knee. Will fiddled with the papers, pretending to straighten them.

Dr. Lecter tilted his head as he watched the tattooist, noting the fact that Will had yet to look him in the eye. Rather than pointing out how rude it was not to look at the person you were talking to, he said, “I would like to know what happened to Abigail that has you concerned about her returning to her father’s care.”

Will paused his fiddling, sitting back in his chair. He went back to staring at the paisley tie. “What makes you say I have concerns?”

“Your tone for one. You seem hostile to a man you haven’t met.”

A fleeting and ugly grin passed Will’s lips. “Don’t have to meet him to know him.” His gift let him pick up things about Mr. Hobbs just through what he'd seen of Abigail. So, no. He wasn't very fond of Mr. Hobbs.

“I’m assuming you’re talking about the recent news?”

“No. I’m talking about Abigail.”

A short pause. The doctor was evaluating him now. “What do you mean?”

Will lifted a shoulder and tried not to flinch away from Dr. Lecter's heavy gaze. Instead, he stared down at his desk, mouth twisting in a grimace. This was one of the many reasons he hated psychiatrists. They always had to go poking their nose in areas they had no business being. Always had to know why or what was going on. Especially in *his* head. And then they always wanted to fix him. Or study him.

Sensing his anxiety, Winston sat up from his bed to lick his knee, his collar jingling loudly in the silence.

“You have a dog.” There was no surprise in the tone. Just a clinical observation.

Will nodded once, reaching down to pat Winston. “I actually have several.”

Realizing that Will had no intention of answering his inquiry, Dr. Lecter changed directions. “How did you find Abigail?”

Will’s gaze rose till it hit the doctor's lips. They were thin. Not the thin he’d often seen on *that* man’s lips when he’d refused to talk to him. Not the thin that expressed pressed lips, trying to withhold scathing remarks or disappointment. Dr. Lecter’s were naturally thin. They were relaxed. Simply waiting to see what would happen. To see what Will would do.

“It was an accident, really. I was walking here. And then, I found Abigail,” Will said slowly, making sure to enunciate each word with care, as his hands moved to lace together on the desk, “in an alleyway with two fucking *monsters* holding a gun to her head.”

There’s a heavy pause. “Mafia members?”

Will shrugged. Bev had asked basically the same thing. “Maybe.”

“And what happened to the men?”

Will’s fingers flexed, his gaze sliding to his gun briefly, before moving to the wall. “I got her out.”

“You shot them.” It wasn’t a question, just another observation. The doctor tilted his head, looking Will up and down. “Aren’t you concerned about the police? If they track their deaths back to you, your shop will be shut down. And you will go to jail.”

Will choked on a laugh. The police were fairly useless here. With the mafia in control of every major power house, the police were included in that. They wouldn't stick their noses in anything that appeared even remotely syndicate related. Those bodies were going to get swept under the rug like everything else related to the mafia.

But Will didn't point that out. "No. They're very rarely helpful, and even more rarely intelligent. I have no connection with the men. So, unless you plan on telling them, I don't think I have anything to worry about."

The tension in the room thickened, and Will couldn't resist looking at Dr. Lecter in the eye.

An abyss waited for him. Dark and deep. It was like drowning. All encompassing. Those eyes more than brown, closer to maroon than anything, gave nothing away. Completely blank. No, almost blank. There was a curiosity there that had Will shifting in his seat, quickly looking away again.

"I could," Dr. Lecter said, nodding slightly, but Will was already shaking his head before he'd finished.

"You won't."

The doctor cocked his head to the side, a small smile playing across his lips, humor coloring his words. "And why won't I, Will? I should uphold the law, shouldn't I?"

Will smiled at the doctor, though it was more a baring of teeth. "Because we both know how lawful our cops are. If you want justice done, they aren't who you go to."

"In that case, I could go to the mafia. Keep danger from my door by reporting you. I hear the Ripper Mafia pays a handsome sum for valuable information."

The Ripper Mafia. The most ruthless and powerful group in the city. They were known for stringing up rivals, ripped apart, and hung up artfully for the whole world to see. Run by the Chesapeake Ripper himself. Or herself. The elusive mafia boss had evaded identification for years. But the Ripper didn't need a face when his name was enough to inspire fear.

Will barked a laugh. "You don't strike me as the type to go to the mafia. You have your image to maintain."

The doctor went still at the words. Will almost missed it. The doctor wasn't fidgety to begin with. But there was a prickling sensation at the back of his neck, like a warning. His muscles tightened in response, fingers twitching, readying for a fight.

And then, the doctor huffed a laugh and the feeling vanished. Will'a muscles relaxed as Dr. Lecter said, "Very true, Will. I don't want my patients having to worry about who might be able to get a hold of their files."

Those words didn't sit right. It was similar to when you put on a shirt and found that it had shrunk a little in the dryer. Still fits, but not quite right. Workable, but uncomfortable. Will wasn't sure why, but he was missing something.

“You’d lose all your clients,” Will said, shrugging off his concern. This doctor was strange, and Will could just be hypersensitive since he didn't like psychiatrists to begin with.

“And I’d lose my license.”

“And you’d consider that a great loss.”

“Of course. I enjoy helping people,” Dr. Lecter said. His legs shifted, drawing Will’s attention to the deep blue pants. In this lighting, they almost looked black. “It’s why I started off as a doctor in a hospital before I shifted to psychiatry. Which is why I’d like to personally thank you for saving Abigail. She means a great deal to me. Is there something I could do to repay you? ”

It took Will’s brain a minute to catch up to what Dr. Lecter had said. “What?”

He looked back to the doctor, eyes lifting to his sharp nose, watching those lips twitch in a suggestion of a smile. “I want to repay you for saving dear Abigail.”

Again, that suspicious feeling started to creep through Will. His eyes narrowed, lips flattening. “Seems a bit much from someone who’s just an acquaintance.”

“Not at all. I’m deeply fond of the Hobbs family. Mr. Hobbs has been progressing beautifully in his therapy. He’s truly becoming a new man, and this would have been detrimental to him,” Dr. Lecter said, leaning back in his seat. The chair gave a squeak in protest. Will probably should get it replaced soon before it sent one of his clients to the floor. “And I’ve found I have a rather soft spot for Abigail. She’s an intelligent child.”

Will ran a hand through his hair. He didn’t want a psychiatrist hanging around him any longer than they had to. Especially this one. No matter how attractive Will found him. “Dr. Lecter —”

“Please. Call me Hannibal.”

“Hannibal,” Will huffed, crossing his arms, “that really isn’t necessary. I didn’t do anything you need to repay me for.”

“On the contrary. Not many people would put themselves in harm's way to save a stranger.”

Silence stretched between them as they reached an impasse. Winston crawled out from under his desk, shaking the sleep from himself. He looked to Will, large eyes taking him in before rounding the desk to approach the doctor. Both men watched the former stray as he sniffed the stranger’s shoes. Dr. Lecter paused before reaching down to let Winston smell his hand. Winston cocked his head, moving forward to put his head on the doctor’s lap.

“Winston, down.”

The order from Will had Winston pulling away to lay down at Hannibal’s feet, tail thumping in encouragement for pets. The doctor acquiesced to the demand, leaning down to rub his ears. “He seems to be well trained.”

Will hummed in agreement, eyeing Winston fondly. He was one of the first strays he took in after his dad died. He was also the only one that Will refused to let Bev put up for adoption when she was helping him find them good homes.

The doctor turned his attention back to the tattooist, folding his hands in his lap. “I must insist on you allowing me to repay your kindness.”

“I didn’t do it for any kind of reward,” Will said, shaking his head at the offer, but it seemed like the doctor was going to win in the end. He clearly wasn’t going to let this go until Will allowed him to repay him in some form. The doctor clearly didn’t like owing anyone anything. “But, if you insist.”

Another one of those closed mouth smiles passed Hannibal’s lips, there and gone. “I’m afraid I do.”

“Then you can repay me by keeping an eye on Abigail.”

Surprise radiated off the doctor, though his face was as blank as ever. He’d expected Will to ask for money. Or something along those lines. Not that Will could blame him. He knew it was obvious that he wasn’t swimming in cash.

“It’s clear that her family has issues.” *Mafia issues* was left unsaid, but hung in the air. “I’d rather never find her in that situation again. Consider me repaid if you keep an eye on her.”

The doctor pursed his lips, head tilting to the side. “Is that all you want?”

“That’s all I need.”

Hannibal opened his mouth, but was interrupted by commotion outside the office door.

“Freddie! What the hell are you doing?”

Bev’s words pulled a groan from Will. He really needed to find a replacement for the red head. “Actually, I need a new secretary, but I’m afraid you can’t help me with that.”

Before Hannibal could say anything to that, Will stood and marched to the door, swinging it open to reveal Freddie. She was barefoot, crouched by the doorknob. Clearly listening. There was no telling how long she’d been. Her green eyes sparked with satisfaction, a smirk pulling on her painted lips.

Will’s stomach dropped at the realization that she probably heard most of their conversation. Which meant she could sell him out to the mafia. They would string him up by his *ribs* for interfering with their business.

Without waiting for her excuses, Will said, “You’re fired, Freddie. Please get the hell out of my shop.”

She blinked, slowly rising from her crouch, pasting on a frown. “Come on Boss, you know you need me—”

“I won’t repeat myself. Get. Out.”

There was a pause, and then she grinned. She looked like the proverbial cat who ate the canary. “Very well, whatever you say Graham.”

She flounced off down the hall. Will watched her, as did Bev who was in the doorway of one of the private rooms, Abigail by her side. “Bev, make sure she leaves without stealing anything.”

Pinching the bridge of his nose, Will let out a heavy sigh as Bev followed Freddie. He felt like a dead man walking.

“Problems?”

Will jumped, turning to look at Hannibal who’d crept up behind him. He’d forgotten about him. He found that they were almost the same height. For someone so big, he walked surprisingly quietly. The doctor was only an inch or so taller, and broader in the shoulders. Not that that was surprising, considering how often Will missed meals. But, overall they were evenly matched in stature.

Will looked back to Freddie, who was being hovered over by a glaring Bev. “Probably.”

Hannibal looked from Freddie to Will, reading between the lines. Finally, he buttoned his jacket back up as he said, “I don’t think you have to worry.”

“Thanks, but with Freddie, I always have to worry.”

“I’ll find you another secretary, since it is partially my fault you’ve had to fire her.” It wasn’t the worry that Will was thinking about, but it was one that he was going to have to address. Again.

“Don’t give yourself so much credit, Dr. Lecter. Freddie was well on her way to being fired before you came in.”

“Consider this my thank you for Abigail.”

Will paused, looking back to the doctor. Hannibal was smiling down at him, clearly pleased with himself. Will was going to need a new hire, and there was no doubt that Hannibal knew people who’d fit the job. People who Will wouldn’t have to worry about stealing from him. Or pulling a gun on him. Or other things. And the doctor wouldn’t have reason to come back.

Slowly, Will nodded.

There was a flash of teeth as the doctor smiled unrestrained down at Will briefly. Will got the feeling he didn’t smile like that often. “Perfect. You should have a new secretary by the end of the week.”

“It’s Thursday, Hannibal.”

The doctor nodded, ignoring the incredulous in Will's tone, as he slipped past the tattooist. He held out his hand to Abigail who had remained in the doorway of the private tattoo room. She took it quickly, the sleeve of Will's jacket hiding her hand. She moved to stand slightly behind Hannibal as he paused to look back at Will. “I’m aware, William. But, you don’t have anything to worry about.”

Again, something in the way he said that gave Will the impression that he was talking about more than what it sounded like. But before he could say anything, Hannibal turned and the pair walked out of his shop, to a Bently parked outside. Of course the psychiatrist drove a Bently. Will wouldn’t have expected anything less from the elegant Dr. Lecter.

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

Despite Will's reservations about the good doctor, I do believe Hannibal already has him hook, line, and sinker. It's definitely the accent. It would be for me.

Nightmares

Chapter Summary

Will dreams, Hannibal has to change his plans

Chapter Notes

This is a shorter chapter than I've previously posted, buuuuut you get Hannibal's perspective for a hot second.
I do believe it evens out.

Not beta read

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The nightmares came back in full force that night. As did the sleep walking. And the stag.

Will woke, sweating and shaking, hovering between his kitchen next to the front door and a forest of corpses. It took him a minute for his vision to clear of mutilated bodies and twisted faces. There had been so much blood. He'd been bathed in it. A stag of black and raven feathers had stood over him, breathing hot and heavy down his neck. Nudging him through the maze of bodies, taking him somewhere. Always taking him somewhere, but never arriving. It had been months since he last saw it.

The kitchen swam into focus, the off white cabinets with the doors that hung crooked and soft blue walls. Will's legs shook so bad that he staggered, almost falling against some of the cabinets but a firm hold on his pants kept him from going too far.

Winston was biting onto his boxer shorts, keeping him steady. Judging by the length of the tear in them, he'd probably been holding on for a while. Max stood in front of the door, head lowered. The massive stray was trying to help corral Will. Not that Will would have gotten far with the door locked, padlocked, and chained. He'd invested in the chain lock after he sleepwalked out onto the streets one night. Winston had trailed behind him, with the other dogs following, till he woke up almost three blocks away from his apartment.

His other rescues stood in the living-bedroom area, watching him with keen eyes.

"Sor—sorry guys," he said, his voice cracking. He was so thirsty. Bending down, he loved on Winston in thanks, rubbing his ears. Holding out his other hand, Max trotted over, getting in on the thank you pets. His dark fur was soft under Will's fingers.

The light from the city seeped through the front windows, illuminating the cramped space. It was basically a square with the only other room the bathroom. His kitchen, living room, bedroom, and office were all in one area. An old television sat in one corner, and his bed in the other. Books were stacked randomly throughout the room, since he had no room for actual shelves.

Standing, Will swayed feeling suddenly light headed. His stomach growled lightly, but the idea of eating anything nauseated him. Instead he pulled down a cup from the cabinet and filled it with water. His tongue was sticking to the roof of his mouth, like when you wake up after having too much alcohol. His hands sloshed water as he drank, unable to stop the shaking. There'd been so much blood. His hands were coated in it.

Tilting his head back, he stared up at the ceiling, his mind wandering back to the alleyway. He could remember everything so clearly. The thump of their bodies hitting concrete. The smell of trash, urine, and blood. The unnatural ruby color of the blood as it had seeped out of the suits. How good it felt pulling the trigger. The adrenaline that had remained pumping in his system long after.

Bile swelled up his throat. Putting his glass in the sink, Will headed for the bathroom to get a towel. He pulled off his soaked shirt and boxers and tossed them in the overflowing hamper as he passed it. He'd need to go to the laundromat soon.

Turning on the bathroom light, he flinched. Both from the sudden brightness and his own reflection.

There was certainly nothing attractive about him, unlike a certain doctor who'd haunted his thoughts long into the night. Dark circles clung under Will's eyes, and the lack of proper meals had turned his body all sharp angles and pale skin. The white walls didn't help. They made his skin look even more swallow. The lack of color caused his scars and tattoos to standout starkly against his skin. Lifting a hand, he let his fingers trail across the ship wheel, tracing the date as he felt it bend over his ribs that pressed harshly out. Moving up, his hand traced over the scar on his shoulder. A mugging in his late teens ended with a knife in it. It still twinged when the weather changed.

The more he stared at his reflection, the more he noticed how different the two of them were. He was sure that Dr. Lecter wasn't ever chased from sleep by images of blood and death. He struck Will as a person who was relatively problem free. Nothing to send him screaming and sweating from sleep.

Jerking his hand away from the scar like he'd been burned, Will bent down to grab a towel from under the sink. There was no point in showering. He'd probably just wake up in a puddle of sweat again before the night was up.

Wiping down, he shut off the light, heading to his dresser. The top drawer consisted of only old tees and sleep boxers. Winston was curled up at the end of the bed, watching as Will pulled on clean clothes. The others had settled again around the bed. Buster, the smallest of the group, was sleeping so hard he was snoring.

Spreading the towel out on the bed, Will crawled on top of it, laying on his side as he tried to steady himself. The nightmare clung to the edges of him. It was a weight on his chest making it difficult to breathe. The stag was there, hovering near the edge of his vision. Calm and watching. He knew in a week, after his brain had time to process things, it would disappear again. Until the next time.

The alarm clock on his nightstand glared an angry red two-seventeen a.m.

Swallowing hard, Will turned to lay on his back, closing his eyes in the hopes of sleep. It was going to be a long night.

Dr. Hannibal Lecter sat in one of the libraries in his home, fingers flexing as he finished recording the end of the song he'd been composing for a while. This library, like the rest of his house, had been carefully crafted to reflect wealth and taste. The vaulted ceilings were elegantly crown molded, with the shelves a dark wood, and walls a deep teal. Accents of gold and white brought it together. A fireplace took up most of one wall, with a painting of the woods hanging on the stone chimney.

Hannibal held the music sheet out, running a critical eye over his work. He'd found himself stuck on how to end it for a while now. It had teased at him, humming at the back of his mind, but much too quietly for him to grasp properly. Until today however. He'd finally been able to hear it with shocking clarity.

All thanks to Will Graham. The unassuming tattooist.

When Hannibal had first answered the phone, he'd considered hunting him down. Will Graham was rough, borderline rude. Especially when he'd tried to slip his way out from meeting with Hannibal. Hiding behind the excuse of paperwork, which had clearly been mostly done.

And yet.

Hannibal set his pen and music sheet down next to his three phones on the bar table. Two for work and one for personal use. He sat back, folding his hands over his stomach as he stared at the plaid jacket he'd taken from Abigail. It now sat in the chair across from him, cleaned and neatly folded. It was atrocious really. From the make to the condition, none of it had any worth. It deserved to be burned.

Hannibal tilted his head as he looked at it, reaching for his wine glass. It reflected the soft light of the lamp, the red wine so dark it was almost black. The ticking of the clock that sat on one of the bookshelves, reading close to two-thirty in the morning, filled the room. Later than he usually remained up, but he was waiting for a call.

The time had given him the opportunity to finish his composition uninterrupted. The image of the tattooist had created music in his head. From his wild curls, to piercing eyes. Eyes of a stormy sea. Something untameable and yet trapped all the same. Eyes that Hannibal had

thought seen too much with just a glance. He'd found himself reaching for the scalpel he kept hidden up his sleeve when their eyes had met.

But in the end, it seemed the other man had only brushed just under his person suit. He didn't seem inclined to delve deeper either, judging by the way he faithfully avoided looking at Hannibal. Something Hannibal considered rude till they spoke about Mr. Hobbs. Will had known. Known more than he'd had any way of knowing about the father. It'd made Hannibal curious.

And then with Ms. Lounds. Hannibal had known she'd been listening in. He'd smelled that cheap perfume through the door. He'd been debating whether to tell the other man of her presence, or wait and see what would happen, but Ms. Katz had gotten in the way. Now he owed her his gratitude for what he witnessed when Will had thrown open his office door.

He'd transformed right before Hannibal's eyes, if only for a moment. Gone was the shy, hunched artist. In his place stood a predator. One who was looking for weaknesses to strike. His spine had lengthened, straightened, head lifting to show an almost lupine look in his gaze that didn't leave his employee's. There was a predatory intent in those eyes that promised blood if Ms. Lounds so much as breathed wrong. He was a wolf staring down a scavenging coyote.

He was beautiful. He was captivating.

And then he was gone, folding back in himself like a dying flower, locking himself back into that deceptive form of a shy, practically starving tattooist.

Hannibal's fingers twitched at the thought. He wanted to rip off that facade and see what animal lurked under the disguise. He wanted to see who Will Graham truly was. And then he wanted to see if he played well with others.

His work phone rang. And not the one that was for his patients.

"Yes?"

His voice was soft, thoughts still lingering on the tattooist as one of his men cleared their throat on the other end. "We've got a problem, sir."

Hannibal remained silent, knowing that his subordinate would explain. He set his wine glass down, straightening his music sheets as he waited.

"She's staying with the Maestro group."

Hannibal fought to keep from snarling into the phone. Until she either ventured out into neutral territory or gave him a reason to cross into Tobais' area, he couldn't reach her. Not yet. It would start a war, and while Hannibal didn't mind violence, it would upend plans he already had in motion. He didn't like it when things didn't go as he planned, but he could improvise when needed.

Instead, he said, “She is now?” His voice was soft and composed, betraying none of the anger that was building in him. A simple chore had become a rather complicated ordeal. He could hear the other man swallow on the other end. There were consequences when you failed the Chesapeake Ripper. “That is unfortunate.”

“Sir, we have the area—”

“That won’t be necessary Mr. Wallous,” Hannibal said, smoothly cutting the man off. Ideas of what he’d do to the group who’d failed flitted through his mind. Nothing over the top. They hadn’t earned the honor of becoming art. “Please send out a message that Will Graham, owner of *Wolf Trap Tattoo Shop* , is on the No Harm list and is not to be approached by any mafia members but mine. After you’ve done that, I’m afraid your team's services are no longer required. Please feel free to return home. It’s late. I’m sure your wife is worried about where you are.”

Deafening silence came from the other end. He could practically smell the fear coming through the phone. Before he could say anything though, Hannibal said, “Have a good night, Mr. Wallous” and hung up, rolling the phone in his hand.

Ms. Lounds turned out to be more evasive than he’d originally considered. A true survivor with keen instincts. While Hannibal could admire those traits, it forced him to change his plans for William. That was a problem. He was sure even with the barrier he’d just placed, there would be some who’d see that as a challenge. And others who wanted revenge for him stopping Abigail’s death. Things were about to get a little messier than he preferred. Now he had to decide what to do about it.

After a long debate, Hannibal lifted the phone and called another number.

It rang a few times, and almost went to voicemail, when a groggy hello echoed down the line.

“Good morning,” Hannibal answered politely, a sharp smile pulling at his lips as he felt them freeze on the other end. “I believe it’s time you repaid that debt.”

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

Poor Mr. Wallace. I think I would have pissed myself if I got that kinda call from Hannibal.

Also, Winston's behavior is based off I dog I had as a child. A gold retriever who'd herd us to our beds if she caught us wandering around after the parents had gone to bed. I kinda feel they've got similar personalities.

The New Secretary

Chapter Summary

Will gets a new secretary and a phone call

Chapter Notes

So, this chapter basically determined a few major plot points going forward. I had a few ideas of where to go from here, but it depended on who ended up becoming the secretary. Since I wasn't sure which plot to go with, I drew names from my Hat to decide this stories fate.

Whop.

Not beta read

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal had indeed provided Will with a secretary before the end of the week. By the next day, after his shift at *Royale,* he found someone sitting behind the front desk, and it wasn't Bev or one of the guys.

Her name was Molly Foster. And Will wasn't sure what to do with her.

She was chipper. And warm. And not nosy. She was the very opposite of Freddie. She had a habit of having a cup of coffee ready for him when he walked in. And food. She always had a tupperware of food for him to scarf down before he started working. She was insistent on that point. Bev took her side.

"We both know you're too thin as it is," she said when he turned to her on the first day he walked in and found food being shoved at him. Molly handed him a cup of coffee as she introduced herself, and then the container of food, refusing to let him turn her down. She'd been adamant on him eating it. And then Price and Zeller got in on it. Price had said that Will didn't need a babysitter. Zeller said one strong breeze would blow Will away.

When they really started to get into it, and draw the attention of clients, Will snatched up the container just stop their fighting. Now, Molly left one for him everyday sitting on his desk. He'd hand it back to her after he'd eaten some of it, and she always took it with a smile, asking him if he'd enjoyed it. He had so far. She was one hell of a cook.

It'd been almost a week since she started working for him, and Will had nothing to complain about. Other than the fact he could not shake Hannibal from his shop. Or his thoughts.

He'd shown up again to bring him a jacket. And not his jacket. In fact, it wasn't a jacket at all, but a coat. It was deep blue wool with wood buttons. It was clear that it had been designed for cooler weather. And that it was expensive. More than anything Will owned, including his apartment.

It started with a phone call.

Molly had come back to his office, popping her head in to make sure he wasn't busy. Her blond hair was pulled back into a tight bun. Professional, but not cold. She held out the shop phone silently, smiling slightly at him as he rose from behind his desk, startling Winston who'd been snoozing underneath. He answered, expecting it to be a client.

"Hello, this is Will, owner of *Wolf Trap Tattoo Shop*. How can I help you?"

"Good evening, Will."

Will froze at the soft voice. He hadn't expected the doctor to have any more contact with him after last week. After a short pause, he lowered himself back into his seat as he said, "Good evening, Hannibal."

"How is Ms. Foster working out for you?" Hannibal inquired, polite and professional like always.

"She's good," Will said, rubbing a finger right about his eyebrow. He shook his head, leaning back in his seat. "Actually, she's great. I don't know where you found her. I've never had such an easy hire." He eyed the "Don't Rehire" list hanging on the back of his door. It'd gotten long enough that he needed to tape another piece of paper under the first one for more room. It was a little irritating how easily Hannibal had made it.

"I'm pleased to hear that. Since you hired her on my recommendation, I would feel guilty if she wasn't a good fit," Hannibal said, his tone polished. If Will didn't know better, he'd believed he could hear something more than professionally pleased in those words. Like that of a large cat laid out in the sun. "And, as a single parent, Ms. Foster was more than happy to fill the position."

Will blinked, his eyes sliding to the door that Molly had left cracked open when she'd left. He hadn't asked much about her life since she'd been there. Usually, Bev was the one who did the digging on new employees. He figured if there was something he should know, she'd tell him.

Hannibal picked up on Will's surprise. "You didn't know?" There was genuine surprise in those words. Like he'd expected Will to know everything about her.

Will didn't respond right away, because he couldn't say that he didn't know. He'd avoided knowing. Avoided looking at her. Avoided seeing too much. He'd learned his lesson about letting himself read his employees too closely. Even with Bev, he tried not to look at her too

closely. It made relationships of any kind harder when one person knew more than the other wanted to give. There was always an imbalance in the relationship.

Licking his lips, Will finally said, “No. I try to keep my relationship with my employees professional. Makes things easier.”

Hannibal hummed, like he knew Will was lying. At least partially. “Ms. Foster has a little boy. I’m afraid her husband passed away a few years back.”

Will could imagine what she had to go through as a single parent. Especially in a city like this. His own father had quickly become a single parent once they moved here after all. He wondered how often she had to go without food in order to make sure that her boy ate.

A frown pulled at Will’s mouth. She shouldn’t be bringing him food, not with a kid to worry about. He was a grown man. She should prioritize herself and her family first. It was irresponsible of her to do that. But, she probably had more than one job where she had to bribe her boss in some fashion to keep her job. Or been put in positions where she'd been taken advantage of. An ugly truth of their city.

“And what about Ms. Katz?”

“What?”

Hannibal’s question jarred Will out of his train of thought. He ran back over the conversation, trying to determine where Hannibal was going with that question. He wondered if he’d missed something.

He heard Hannibal shift on the other end of the line. “You said you like to keep things professional with your employees, but Ms. Katz does not seem to be held to that rule.”

“How do you know she isn’t?”

There was something sharp in his tone that had the doctor pausing, like he was considering what he should say next. “I concluded she was a friend based on her reaction to Ms. Lounds,” Hannibal said. Will could hear the smile curling his words. The slight twitch of his lips that always gave away the doctor's humor. “While most people would find Ms. Lounds off-putting to some extent, Ms. Katz was quite protective of you when it came to your previous secretary.”

Will wilted a little, his hand reached under his desk, fingers digging into Winston’s fur as the dog rose to meet his owner’s searching hand. Naturally. Bev didn’t hide her care for him. He tilted his head to the side, eyes moving from Winston back to the door. “Bev is different. She tends to be the exception of the rule.”

“I can believe that of Ms. Katz. She appears to be a remarkable lady.”

Will snorted, shaking his head. “I would appreciate it if you didn’t tell her that. She’ll be even bossier about my personal life than she already is.”

“I find it hard to see you allowing anyone to tell you what you should do.”

A smile curled Will's lips. "Again, Bev is the exception to the rule."

Silence followed. It felt like Hannibal was waiting for something. Will looked around his office, shifting in his seat. Paperwork was stacked along the edge of his desk. With his new employee, there was a little more than usual, but nothing he couldn't handle quickly. Patting Winston again, Will said, "If that's all, I should probably go. I have a client coming in soon."

"Actually," Hannibal said, keeping Will from hanging up, "the reason I called was to ask when it would be an appropriate time to return your jacket."

Will blinked, pulling the phone away to stare incredulously at it. There was no way Hannibal was considering coming back to give him his jacket back. "You called to ask when you could return my jacket?"

"Of course. I'm afraid I forgot to have Abigail return it before we left last time. I didn't want to be rude and simply drop by whenever."

That would have been preferable since WIll could have pretended to be in the middle of doing something. Or he might have gotten lucky and been in the middle of an appointment.

Clearing his throat, Will asked, "How is Abigail?"

Papers rustled on the other end before Hannibal answered. "She is recovering remarkably. Ms. Katz did a fine job giving her first aid. Very commendable of one who doesn't have any medical background."

"Live here long enough and you'll have no choice but to learn the basics of first aid," Will said, contempt bleeding into his tone. He huffed, trying to shove the feeling away. He doubted Hannibal would appreciate being spoken to that way. "Did her father take her to a doctor?"

"Seeing as I am a qualified physician, he had me look her over when I'd brought her to him. He unfortunately has a deep mistrust for many in the medical field."

"And yet he is seeing a psychiatrist." Will would sooner see a doctor than a psychiatrist. The doctors he'd always seen had wanted to help him, whereas the psychiatrists had always wanted to use him for their own gain. Always trying to find ways to make their names more distinguished than their colleagues. Suddenly realizing how his tone would come across, Will winced. "Sorry, that was rude."

"There's no need to apologize, Will. You seem to have some issues with those in my field." Hannibal's words made Will flinch again. "And yes, that was a big step for Mr. Hobbs. He shared your dislike for psychiatrists for a long time. I'm afraid our relationship was tenuous for a long time. Even now, he is quick to mistrust me."

Will huffed a laugh. "Can't imagine why. You are such a caring doctor after all. Even going so far as to bring a strangers jacket back to them"

“I care very deeply for my patients, Will," Hannibal said, glossing over Will's comment of bringing him his jacket. "Mr. Hobbs has been working with me a long time, and I didn’t want him to regress. He was in a very precarious position mentally when I brought Abigail back to him.”

Rage licked deep in Will’s gut at the words. Old wounds were beginning to open. He wanted to end this conversation quickly. “And you gave her back to him? Seems irresponsible doctor.”

“Her disappearance caused the disruption, and her reappearance will settle him. Trust me Will, Abigail is safe.”

Will bit back the words that wanted to lash out, his free hand fisting around the arm of his chair. He doubted she was safe at all. In fact, he’d bet anything that thanks to the good doctor, she was in more danger than when she’d been with the suits. Or at least a crueler fate than if she’d been left with the men in the alleyway. But clearly the doctor didn’t agree, and Will had no proof.

He rarely ever had any proof that could convince others. Pieces that when put together proved his words, but no one else seemed to put those pieces together. Instead, he got questioned. He got asked what he had against someone or what his problem was. In the end, it was rarely ever worth the hassle.

“Will?”

Hannibal’s voice brought Will back to the conversation. He hummed in question.

“When can I bring you your jacket?”

Right, he jacket and the impending need to deal with the doctor. Thinking back to the calendar, he ran through his schedule. The sooner he did this, the sooner he could wash his hands of Hannibal Lecter. A part of him sunk at the realization, but he told himself it was for the best in the end. He said, “I have a late appointment at ten tonight, but the shop is open till three. I should be free around eleven-thirty if that isn’t too late for you.”

“Not at all,” Hannibal said pleasantly. “Then I’ll see you at eleven-thirty.”

Will agreed before hanging up, setting the phone down. His gut clenched at the idea that he’d once again see Hannibal in a few hours. If he was honest with himself, it was more than just fear that caused the reaction. Anticipation was there too, much to his chagrin. It was unfurling in his chest, stealing his attention from his work. He wanted to meet Hannibal again as much as he didn’t.

There was something about the man that drew Will in. He’d appeared in Will’s dreams twice already, and the stag had been in every other dream. He chased the beast away, replacing the morbid and gruesome nightmares with softer, sweeter images of light touches and whispered words. Will didn't want to dwell on what that meant. That and Molly acted as a reinforcement of Hannibal in his daily thoughts. Every time he looked at her, he thought of the doctor.

He tried not to look at her.

“Will?”

Jerking up, he found Molly standing in the doorway, blue eyes watching him carefully. He wondered how long she’d been standing there.

“Yes?”

“I just came to see if you were done with the phone,” she said, gesturing to the phone on the desk. “But you seemed to be in deep thought. Sorry for bothering you.”

The sheepish grin she gave him had him shaking his head, running a hand through his hair. “No, no, don’t worry about it. It wasn’t anything important. My brain has a habit of taking me away,” he said as he held the phone out to her. “Hannibal is coming by later. You can send him to me whenever he comes in.”

Molly bobbed her head, a tight smile spreading across her mouth, as she took the phone. “Will do, Boss.”

Will cocked his head to the side, taking in her expression and body language. “Is that a problem?”

Her eyes widened briefly before shaking her head, her smile softening to something much more natural. “Oh no, I just have a lot of respect for Dr. Lecter, and I don’t think I’ve heard many people referring to him by his first name. Caught me off guard,” she said laughing. “I didn’t know you were friends.”

Will flinched back from the words, twisting his chair so he stared at the wall rather than her. He didn’t want her to see his expression. “We aren’t. We just have some business to finish up.”

There was a pause, like she hadn’t been expecting that response. Not that he could blame her. He was socially awkward at the best of times. He was sure being an employee for someone like that wasn’t easy either.

“Alright,” Molly said, her voice quiet. It was like she didn’t want to cause him any more distress.

Her footsteps retreated to the door till Will said, “Should you need to take off for any reason for your kid, don’t be afraid to tell me. Being a single parent isn’t easy and we’re more than capable of handling your workload for a day or two.”

Molly halted, twisting around to look at Will, who was still stubbornly facing the wall.

“Thank you.”

Will gave a jerky nod, looking down to see Winston having crawled out from under the desk to stretch his legs. “You should also put your health above mine. I can take care of myself, and I don’t have a child to take care of. Don’t make me any more meals.”

“But—”

“No,” Will said, his voice harsh as he turned to stare her down. Her eyes widened at the sudden eye contact, hands tightening around the phone. “You have a boy who needs you. Don’t compromise your own health to bribe me into keeping you. You’re good at the job. It’s yours whether you bring me dinner or not.”

Molly didn’t answer right away, but she gradually relaxed. “Wally.”

Will fought the urge to turn back to the wall. Instead, he let his gaze drop to her blue tee that had a stain near the hem. Her kid probably spilled something on it. “What?”

“Walter is my kid’s name, but he goes by Wally. He’s eleven. Just finished fifth grade. He’s been complaining about how all the girls in his grade are taller than him.”

Will’s gaze dropped further down, to her jeans that looked like they were a size too big. “Alright.”

“And my parents are helping me out, so bringing you food isn’t a big deal. It’s easier to make for more people than less anyways,” she continued, ignoring Will’s short answers. Her words brought his gaze back up to hover around her nose.

“Molly—”

“Will.”

He huffed a laugh, looking down to Winston at her tone. She was definitely a mother. “I don’t need your food. I am capable of taking care of myself.”

“It’s no big deal to bring you dinner. You don’t seem to have time to make your own. Besides, Bev tends to eat what you don’t, so she’d be upset if I stopped bringing it. And,” Molly continued, seeing Will about to argue, “she would go back to razzing you about eating.”

It was true. Bev had been on a crusade for a long time to get Will to eat regular meals. With Molly cooking him dinner, it meant she only had to worry about two meals, rather than three. If Will forced Molly to stop, she’d hound him till he let Molly start bringing him dinner again.

He eyed his new secretary, debating with himself even though he knew what he’d do. “Fine,” he agreed, but lifted a hand to keep her from saying anything. “But if I find out that you are suffering because of it, I will stop you. Is that clear?”

She nodded, her bangs swinging with the motion. “Yep! Consider it heard loud and clear.”

“And I meant it about asking off if you need it.”

“I know,” she said, backing towards the door. “You’re a good man, Will Graham.”

“I don’t know about that,” Will said, giving a soft smile to her shoes. “I am mooching food off you.”

“Not the worst thing that’s been mooched off me.”

Will’s eyes flashed at the admission, but Molly was gone before he could look up at her, shutting his office door quietly behind her. Clearly she has her own scars she liked to hide behind that smile. And Will had no intention to pry into them. No one liked old scars being poked at. One of the reasons he hated psychiatrists. They never knew when to leave well enough alone.

Breathing deep, Will tried to get the anticipation and worry to dissipate. Those maroon eyes kept flashing behind his eyelids at the most inopportune times. Will didn’t want to get shanked because his head was so caught up on Hannibal that he screwed up someone’s tattoo.

Maybe it was a good thing that Hannibal had been a medical doctor before he was a psychiatrist.

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

Honestly, did not plan for it to be Molly. You'll probably hate me for it later, and not the reason you think...oh well. Blame it on the Hat.

Also, I see some smoldering eyeing going on between the *good* doctor and grumpy tattoo artist coming up. Any one else?

The Coat

Chapter Summary

Hannibal shows up and ends up inviting Will to dinner

Chapter Notes

Sorry this took so long! I started this last week, took a break, and when I came back could not remember where I was taking it. Basically, I took one look at it and went "What the hell is this??" and had to overhaul it. This is what I get for never outlining anything.

But finally, I got it out. yay. go me.

Not beta read.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What is that?”

Will glared at the jacket—coat—that Hannibal held out to him. It certainly wasn't his plaid jacket that Abigail had taken. This one was a solid, deep blue. Rich in color and much thicker in material. The light wooden buttons shined in the light of the private room. Will was cleaning his station when Hannibal walked in, the coat draped over his arm. Will had just finished with his client a few minutes ago. This appointment was for Will to finish adding the last touches of color to the man's sleeve tattoo.

Hannibal continued to offer the coat to him, lips twitching in amusement. “It’s your jacket.”

Will's eyebrows quirked at the words. He couldn’t help but wonder what Hannibal was playing at.

“Bullshit.” Will made no move to take the coat from the doctor, twisting in his chair to face him instead of the table with his arms crossed. “You said you were bringing my jacket back. That’s not my jacket. Where is it?”

Hannibal sighed, shifting his hold so that the coat was draped back over his arm. “Unfortunately there was no saving it. I felt it would be rude to not replace it.” Hannibal looked pained at the admission that he hadn’t been able to fix it.

The expression softened Will. Common curtesy appeared to be high up on the doctor's list of rules to follow. He'd already come and gotten Abigail, and then helped him find a new secretary. Now he'd replaced Will's clothes when he wasn't able to save it.

Huffing a laugh, Will gave Hannibal a sheepish smile, arms dropping to rest on his knees. "You didn't need to do that Hannibal. That jacket wasn't worth that much anyways. It definitely was not worth you going out and buying me a completely new coat. I got mine from Goodwill."

Hannibal frowned. He didn't know what Goodwill was, which was obvious based on the three piece he wore today. Slate grey, with the vest having a dark pattern It was paired with a deep purple tie and pocket handkerchief. Opal cufflinks kept snagging Will's attention when they caught the light. There was no telling how much that ensemble alone had cost.

Will was sure Hannibal dressed that way because he knew exactly how those suits made him look. Irresistible. Enticing. Authoritative. Yes, it was partly because of his job, but it also commanded both attention and submission.

Running a quick eye over the doctor, Will's imagination filled in the gaps. Graceful. Hannibal would never hurry anywhere, but walk—no, prowl—through his office. Smooth gait. His footsteps on hardwood floors would be near silent and purposeful. He'd sit straight. Quiet and thoughtful. Legs crossed, hands resting either on his lap or on chairs arms.

Just enough presence that you'd never not know he was in the room.

Will's eyes strayed to Hannibal's hands. Large and tanned. Well taken care of. Capable.

Lowlights and silk sheets flashed through Will's mind before he could stop it. His gut clenched at it, blood rushing to his face in embarrassment and shame.

"Will," Hannibal said, yanking Will's attention away from his derailing train of thought. His tone told Will he wasn't going to take no as an answer. "You have done me a great favor. This is insignificant in comparison."

A blush started to creep up Will's neck. He knew that his thoughts weren't stamped on his forehead, but it felt like they were under Hannibal's gaze. "I didn't do anything," Will muttered, twisting his chair to go back to cleaning his equipment. "Abigail isn't even your kid."

"Does my relation to Abigail negate the significance of your actions?"

Now he sounded like a therapist. Will scowled down at his tattoo gun, fingers fiddling with it. "If what I did was so significant, why isn't her dad here thanking me?"

Silence followed, and a quick glance sideways told him that Hannibal was watching him thoughtfully. Footsteps sounded behind him and then Hannibal asked, now much closer, "Does it matter who thanks you? As for the jacket, Abigail gave it to me before she went with her father, so it's only natural that I am the one returning it."

“But you aren’t. Returning my jacket, I mean. That’s not even something I would even consider getting myself.”

“Do you not like it?”

Will barked a laugh, twisting around to stand, finding Hannibal a lot closer than he’d planned. They were only a few steps apart. Refusing to back down though, Will stared at Hannibal’s throat. “Do I not *like* it? That’s not the point.”

Hannibal inclined his head to the side. His voice was soft, accent thicker when he spoke. “What is the point, Will?”

Will jerked his head up, briefly meeting Hannibal’s gaze before looking away again, towards Hannibal’s shoes. Dark brown and looking to be handcrafted like the last ones he wore. No scuffs or signs of wear. Like everything else Hannibal seems to own, they’re well taken care of.

All of Will’s things, while he did take care of them, were second hand or old. The tennis shoes he was wearing had been new, one of the few things he’d allowed himself to spend a lot of money on, were over three years old. The soles were taped to the shoes and the laces were frayed, but there was no way he could buy more. Not right now. There were other things he needed to take care of before that.

Like dog food.

Prices were beginning to rise on a lot of things because of a war breaking out between the Dynasty Mafia and the Maestro. The Verger family had been the head of the Dynasty group for generations. They started it. Now they handled most of the meat industry.

With the Maestro group trying to grow its territory, it was expanding into the Verger’s domain. Maestro’s group kept hijacking Verger’s meat trucks. In response, the Verger’s had started withholding all food trucks they could from going in or out of the city. It was beginning to cause a panic, but there was not much that could be done.

Will had started reducing what he ate and how much he gave the dogs to try and make things last. Much like his shoes. It was another reason he was unhappy about Molly giving him portions of food every day. There was no telling how long this war would last. He needed to be prepared for the long haul.

“Will?”

Will fought not to flinch at his name. His mind had wandered off again. There was no telling how long Hannibal had been waiting awkwardly for Will to respond. Though, Hannibal didn’t seem to do anything awkwardly.

Glancing up to Hannibal’s face to find no irritation, just open curiosity, Will took a half step back, unsure what to do. He gave a half-shrug. “The point? What is the point, Hannibal? There was a kid in trouble. I did something about it. Her father doesn’t answer the call. He doesn’t come to say thank you. He doesn’t do anything,” Will said, his voice rising with

every word, as he gestured jerkily toward Hannibal. Stopping abruptly, Will shook his head. His hands balled into fists as he shoved them into his pockets, his head dropping so he stared at the wood floors. There were clients in his shop. His employees. Once he had control over himself again, he finished very quietly, “So, what’s the point in you doing any of this?”

After another lull in the conversation, Hannibal asked, his voice soft, gentle, “May I venture a guess to what you are feeling?”

Will didn’t nod, but he didn’t say no either. His shoulders curled in as he warred with himself. He finally said, “Don’t psychoanalyze me Dr. Lecter. You won’t like me psychoanalyzed,” while never lifting his gaze from Hannibal’s shoes.

The words were supposed to come out ugly and harsh. A warning. But instead it was barely more than a whisper. It shook slightly. He had a clear enough view of his mind. He didn’t need anyone else digging around it telling him what was wrong with it.

Warm hands touched his wrists, startling Will. But they were firm enough to keep him still even when he flinched. He hadn’t realized how cold he felt. Hannibal’s hands wrapped around his arms and gently removed them from his pockets. Their shoes were almost touching now.

Slowly, those tan hands slid down to pull Will’s fingers away from his palms, flipping them over so that his hands were palm up. There were deep crescent marks in his hands, deep red and angry purple, but his fingernails hadn’t broke skin. Hannibal’s thumbs brushed gently over the marks, soothing the ache that radiated from them.

Will looked away, to the side so he stared at the mute grey walls that were covered in photographs. The one he found himself staring at was of a man who was standing stark naked thigh deep in Lake Michigan, his back to the camera, displaying the roaring lion that took up most of his back. The pictures were of tattoos he’d done, sent to him from his clients. It started small, with him getting pictures from close clients. They were of the clients showing them off, either on the beach, on top of a mountain, and one in the middle of a New York crosswalk. Later he learned that the client had almost been run over in the process. Will had told them that they would have deserved it for being stupid.

When he started hanging them up, more were sent to his work email. It got to the point where asking for consent to put pictures of the clients and their tattoos up on the wall was included in the forms the clients had to sign before he, or any of his employees, tattooed them. It was easier than having to go back and ask permission.

Another swipe of those fingers over Will’s palms brought his attention away from the pictures. “The point,” Hannibal started slowly, keeping his voice low, as he drew Will’s attention back to him, “is that you noticed something most would have ignored. And then you did something. What you did was not nothing, William. Someone should recognize that.” The words were a soft caress. Softer than the fingers soothing the wounds.

Twin desires warred in Will. One part of him wanted to relax into what Hannibal was saying. There was a pull behind those words that had Will wanting to sink against the man’s broader frame. But, on the flip side, he wanted to pull away. Throw up more forts and ward the other

man off. It was *dangerously* easy to just give in to that pull, and that made Will want to run in the very opposite direction.

Slowly, forcing himself to settle, Will looked up, hands ready to pull away when he froze. Hannibal had ducked his head a little when he'd spoken to Will. His forehead bent so that it nearly touched Will's. Now, where Will thought his nose would be, he found Hannibal's eyes.

Curiosity and something darker swirled in those eyes. Will fought not to get sucked into them. Hannibal had been polite, and Will figured he would find it highly impolite for Will to go picking things out about him without his knowledge. It never did him any good to know too much about anyone.

It was hard to remember that when his heart was hammering loud enough that it was all he could hear. The fact someone was touching him was making him light headed. Bev was the only one who touched him and it was sparingly. Having Hannibal so close made Will sway slightly.

The silence dragged on as Hannibal waited. He wasn't willing to rush the tattooist who was clearly struggling with himself. It was fascinating to watch the war in the man's eyes. The fight between what Will wanted to do and what he thought he should do. He edged even forward, head tipping closer to try and see more clearly what Will was thinking.

An unexpected pinprick of disappointment rippled through Hannibal as he watched Will reel himself in. Like before, it was like watching a flower close off till its true colors were hidden. He released the tattooist's hands easily when Will pulled at them, and he watched silently as Will took a step away from him. Instead, he merely showed professional concern in his expression.

Will tilted his head down, those dark curls falling to hide part of his face again. "I think you've thanked me enough doctor. There was no need for you to go out of your way to replace my jacket," he finally said after he was able to get his brain back on track. The warmth from Hannibal's skin still lingered in his palms, making them tingle.

"Still, I have already bought it. I see no harm in accepting it."

Will glanced back up to see Hannibal holding out the coat to him again. Clearly, Hannibal wasn't going to let him not accept it.

Huffing a sigh in irritation, Will stepped forward, taking the jacket. It was heavier than Will had originally thought. He wouldn't be able to wear it till fall at the earliest.

"I thought the blue would highlight the blue in your eyes," Hannibal said quietly as Will admired the coat. He handled it gently, almost reverently. Watching Will grip the clothing so carefully made Hannibal preen. Will obviously liked the coat, and Hannibal had the desire to go out and bring him another piece just to see the same reaction all over again. Maybe he'd get him shoes next, since the taped one's he was wearing currently made Hannibal's lips curl in distaste.

After another pause, Will tucked the coat in his arms. “Thank you, Hannibal. This was very generous of you.”

“Nonsense. This was a show of gratitude. Nothing more.”

Will gave him an odd look, a smirk pulling at the corner of his mouth. He had to resist the urge to tell the doctor that if he really wanted to show gratitude, he’d leave and never darken Will’s shop door again. But he figured that would probably be seen as rude.

Instead, Will asked, “Was there anything else?”

Will said it just as an easy lead in to leading Hannibal out, but it seemed the doctor did have something else in mind to discuss. Hannibal tucked his hands behind his back, turning to approach one of the walls. He studied the many photos as he said, “I’m planning on hosting a dinner party soon. I was hoping you would join.”

Will’s brows pulled together in confusion. “What?” Every time he thought he was getting rid of the psychiatrist, he found new ways in keeping in touch with Will. It was beginning to feel very much like a game of cat-and-mouse.

Will frowned. He didn’t like the idea of being the mouse, but Hannibal was certainly a cat.

Hannibal turned to look at him again, those lips barely twitching in amusement. “I like to host dinner parties occasionally. I haven’t in a while, but recently I have found myself inspired. Since you are the source for the inspiration, I thought it best to invite you.”

Will blinked at the words. It was hard to decide if Hannibal kidding or not about him being the inspiration, but Hannibal didn't strike him as someone who joked. However, Will wasn't sure if he really wanted him there, or if he was falling for his need for common courtesy and was inviting him out of politeness. Will couldn’t read which way it went, Hannibal’s expression was devoid of any tells.

It was getting harder for Will to tell if it unnerved him how little he could read off Hannibal or if he felt relieved. Most of the time, he was constantly on guard in overstepping into other people’s privacy. But with Hannibal, he found he could relax. The doctor seemed to have an expression of an iron wall. Letting only things he wanted Will to know through.

“Um,” Will started, ducking his head as he gathered himself, “yeah, no. I think I’m gonna pass on that.”

“Any particular reason?”

Hannibal was not a man easily dissuaded Will was finding. “I don’t do so well in the social aspect of things,” Will said, with a self-deprecating laugh. “Tend to make a mess of them actually.”

Hannibal made a show of looking around the room again as he moved towards Will. “It appears you do fine in them, judging from the many photos.”

“Tattooing someone doesn’t mean I have to socialize with them. Just enough to make sure things are how they want it. People are willing to put up with any number of oddities if it gets them what they want.”

Hannibal hummed in thought.

Before he could offer another rebuttal to Will’s words, Will went on, “And I have to work. My shop needs me. Not to mention, I have a feeling your dinner’s are, uh, fancy.”

“Is that a problem?”

“The nicest thing I own you just gave me,” Will answered, running a hand through his hair. “I doubt anything else in my closet would even be close to suitable for your parties.”

“I doubt that.”

“You doubting it wouldn’t bring any less dog hair to your party.”

That got Will an amused look. “All I ask of you Will is that you come as yourself.”

Will cocks his head to the side, eyes skating over Hannibal’s face before falling to the coat in his arms. “You make it sound like I don’t act like myself.”

Soft footsteps sounded and once again he found himself directly in front of the doctor. He refused to look at him though.

“I think you’ve made it an artform to hide yourself.”

The words had Will glaring at the doctor, his hackles rising at the accusation. “Is that your professional opinion, *Dr. Lecter?”* Will hissed, fingers clutching the coat. He hated psychiatrists, and Hannibal had just reminded him why. He lashed out before he could really think. “Because I’m not the only one here who’s good at hiding themselves behind masks and suits.”

Hannibal paused. Maybe Will had seen deeper than he originally thought. His fingers twitched at the idea of the tattooist seeing too far. The need for self preservation brought the beast in him roaring to the forefront. But there was something else. A need to be seen. He wanted to be seen. And he wanted Will to be the one to see him.

“Oh?” Hannibal prompted, his voice soft. “You think I’m hiding Will?”

“I think you are a very dangerous man, Hannibal. More so than most could imagine. And you’ve tailored yourself a very intricate *suit* to make you appear like everyone else.”

Hannibal took in Will’s eyes, watching them blaze to life. The blue seemed to shine even brighter, changing its hues much like a sea getting ready for a storm. It was breathtaking. It also made Hannibal wonder what Will would do if provoked. “All doctors are dangerous in some form or fashion. I am no more dangerous than any other doctor. ”

Again, Will found himself warring against the desire to call Hannibal out on his bullshit. He wanted to bare his teeth. He also found he wanted to get up close and peer deeper. And that was dangerous.

“I don’t believe you,” Will flatly said, raising his gaze to meet Hannibal’s again. A thrill went down his spine at the look Hannibal gave him. It was almost fond. “One of my jobs is evaluating every client who walks through my door. I do it for the safety of me, my store, and my employees. And I’ve gotten very good at it, Dr. Lecter. I know a dangerous person when I see them.”

Hannibal stepped closer, smiling a little at the tattooist who was proving more and more interesting. “And what exactly do you see when you see me, William?”

Electricity sparked between them. Hot and alive. Blood pounded through Will, his breathing picking up as the distance closed between them. His fingers tapped against his legs with the desire to reach up and haul Hannibal close enough to share the same air. It had been a long time since Will had felt this. A cat-and-mouse game indeed. But Will was no mouse. It was hard to decide who was chasing who.

He opened his mouth to tell Hannibal *exactly* what he saw, eyes sparking with the challenge Hannibal was offering him like a present, but a knock on the door startled him.

Bev popped her head in, smiling when she saw Hannibal. “Hey, doc. I didn’t know you were planning on dropping by.”

“Ms. Katz,” Hannibal greeted, inclining his head toward her. The air that had been tight between them vanished with the reminder of the outside world. “I’ve simply stopped by to return Will’s jacket to him.”

Her dark eyes landed on the coat that was now rumpled in Will’s arms. Her gaze narrowed, even as her mouth pulled up in amusement. “Oh, I see.” Something about the way she said that had Will believing he was going to get cornered later for this. “I was just looking for Will, but it can wait till you guys are done.” The last part was said with wiggling eyebrows. He was definitely going to get trapped by her later.

“Actually,” Hannibal started, keeping Bev from disappearing. “I’ve invited Will to one of my dinner parties, but he says he won’t be able to attend because he’ll need to work.”

Actually, he'd given multiple reasons as to why he wouldn't be joining. But Hannibal appeared to be ignoring the others. Will wanted to snarl, mouth popping open to end this conversation but—

“When is it?” Bev asked, pushing the door a little more open so that she could lean against the doorframe. She was steadily looking at Hannibal, pretending Will wasn't glaring at her like she’d just stabbed him in the back. Which she had. She knew how much he hated any kind of socializing.

“Next Friday at seven.”

“Is it a big event? Will doesn’t like big crowds.”

“As I’ve been informed. But, it will be a small get together. Nothing overwhelming.”

“He’ll be off. He doesn’t work at the diner Friday’s—”

“Bev,” Will said, wanting to stop this in its tracks, but she plowed on, ignoring his warning.

“—and with Molly, we can rearrange his schedule no problem. She’s an actual sweetheart. So much better than the previous pitviper. You have our eternal thanks for finding her. She’ll have no trouble freeing up his evening.”

Will could feel the self satisfaction radiating off the doctor. He was much too smug about this turn of tables. He was sure if he tried to skip the dinner, Bev would hog tie him and take him herself. She was a romantic at heart, and clearly she thought she saw a budding romance happening. Which it wasn’t. Will would need to set her straight sooner rather than later.

“Will,” Hannibal said, pulling the tattooist's attention back to him. He was practically preening over the win. Will wasn’t sure if he wanted to punch him or kiss him. “Remember what I said. I expect you to come as yourself.”

“Like you?”

Sharp teeth appeared briefly with an even sharper smile. “Dear Will,” Hannibal said, amusement seeping into his words as a blush rushed to Will’s face at the term, “I always attend as myself for the right people.”

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

Things kinda just went their own way because this is not what I had planned for this chapter. Oops. I wanted less fighting and more smoldering, and maybe almost kissing. But, Will is stubborn and Hannibal is curious. So. yep. They said "fuck your plans" to me and did their own thing. Per usual.

On another note, now that this won't get in the way of you reading the chapter, I wanted to thank you guys for all your comments. They've been really awesome to read. I always hesitate when posting anything I write, but your positive feedback has kept me going. Without you guys, I probably wouldn't have made it past chapter one.

After Hours

Chapter Summary

Everyone learns of Will's date/non-date with Hannibal. Life gets a little harder on Will and Winston.

Chapter Notes

Guess who finally got COVID? Me. This one. I died. Laid me flat on my ass. It's fine. Finally starting to feel like myself again, other than the fact it feels like I did a face plant in a flower full of pollen. Yay.

Other than that:

TW: violence, blood, animal abuse (though not explicit), underaged smoking

Yes, it's expected (this is a mafia Hannibal AU), but everyone has different comfort levels. I'm a big horror movie fan, so this level doesn't bother me, but it might others. Please, if it makes you uncomfortable, skip the section when you get to it. This is meant for enjoyment. If you don't enjoy it, don't read it.

Not beta read

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Traitor,” Will muttered at Bev hours later as Molly locked the front door behind the last client. They stood in the waiting room, with Bev leaning against the front desk and Will sitting in one of the chairs. Winston laid at his feets, eyes shifting between his owner and the one who always gives him treats. “Why the hell did you do that?”

Bev glanced up from her nails, shooting him a grin. “Whatever do you mean Will?” she asked, before catching Molly’s eyes. “Which reminds me, Molly, please clear Will’s schedule next Friday. He has plans.”

Molly glanced between them, her blue eyes wide and wary. It was clear that Will wasn’t happy about whatever was happening Friday. She moved back to the computer, pulling up the schedule to see who had booked him already for that day. “Alright. You only have one person scheduled, so it shouldn’t be too difficult to get them moved.”

Will's glare deepened. He'd hoped to have a full schedule to give him a way out of this. He was usually fairly booked a good two weeks in advance. It was a little surprising that the day was that free. He rubbed his hands over his jeans. It could be with all the inflation that'd been happening people were having to prioritize needs. Getting a tattoo or piercing would be low down on anyone's list.

"Wait, Will's taking a day off? Has Hell frozen over?" Price asked, appearing from the hallway, rag in hand. His black tee showed his entire left arm covered in tribal tattoos. He claimed he had some heritage in it, but Zeller continued to say it was bullshit. Will didn't have the desire or inclination to figure out which was right.

"Who says Hell's not frozen?" Zeller asks from his room, his voice echoing down the hall.

"Most people believe it's not," Price replied, tossing the rag on the counter. Before Zeller could snipe back, he asked, "So, what's so important to pull the infamous workaholic boss from work?"

"Dante suggests it's not all hellfire," Will muttered, reaching down to rub Winston's ears, ignoring his question. It wasn't anyone else's business anyways.

"Poor Will has a date," Bev sang. There was a pause as everyone but Will turned to look at her. She grinned like the cat who got the canary, leaning against the counter. The position tugged at her shirt enough so that her collar revealed the tip of a tattoo. "With our posh Dr. Lecter."

Her statement was met with silence till Zeller yelled from the back, "I was right! Pay up, Jimmy." Price grumbled as he pulled out his wallet.

Will's ears turned pink at his words, the sudden realization of how obvious the interest between the two had been. His stomach dropped, twisting itself up as his blood rushed to his ears. He tried not to twitch under everyone's gaze, but it was like ants were crawling all over him.

He coughed, clearing his throat. "It's not a date, Bev. It's a dinner party he's hosting."

"That he invited you to."

"In thanks for Abigail."

"Please, we both know that's nonsense. Besides, I don't see him offering me an invitation, and I helped a little," she said, wiggling her fingers at him.

Will huffed a laugh, running a hand through his hair, before reaching up to toy with his earrings. It did feel a little like a date. Even though it wasn't. If it was a date, then there wouldn't be other people there. Unless Hannibal knew that Will would never agree otherwise. He didn't do socializing, but he didn't do dates either. Especially not with psychiatrists.

"You have a date with Dr. Lecter?" Molly asked in from behind the desk. She'd been busy blocking off Will's schedule for that Friday. Now, she was writing out a reminder on a sticky

note to call the one appointment that had already been scheduled.

Something in her tone made Will pause. He looked at her, but her head was bent down as she wrote her note. “It’s not a date.”

And Bev picked up what had made Will look at her. “And you sound surprised. And while he may not look it, my Will is a catch.”

“Your Will?”

She waved him off, turning to stare down Molly who was fiddling with the empty food container. She glanced up, before ducking her head again, giving a half shrug. “Dr. Lecter is a really private person. And professional.”

“We noticed,” said Bev, cocking her head. It was impossible to miss those aspects of his personality. The three piece suits and impeccable manners told anyone within seeing distance that.

“So, it’s always a surprise when he takes a liking to a person. From what I’ve seen, it’s usually someone—you know,” she paused, hands balling into fists in her lap, unsure how to phrase the next part. Sighing, Will leaned back in his seat, preparing himself for whatever came next. There were a number of reasons Dr. Hannibal Lecter had never shown interest in someone like him. He was curious which one she’d use.

“Wealthy?” offered Price.

“Put together?” Zeller added, appearing next to him, trash bag in hand. He smelled strongly of cleaning products.

“Not covered in dog hair?” Bev said as she grinned at Will, pointedly looking down at Winston who had moved to lay his head over his feet. “With how many dogs you have, there’s no time you aren’t covered in dog hair.”

Shaking his head, he turned back to Molly. She bit her lip, scratching her neck. “It’s just that everyone I’ve seen him with *is* wealthy and renowned. That’s all.”

“So is Will,” Zeller said, earning an elbow from Price. It wasn’t something Will wanted brought up. Ever. “Well, not wealthy. Not with the amount of dogs he has.” Again, everyone looked to Winston who was close to falling asleep. “How much does it even cost to feed all of them?” he asked, brows pinching together.

Will shrugged, tugging on one of his earrings. “A lot.”

“Off topic,” Bev cut in, steering the conversation back to the original focus. She turned back to Molly. “You don’t think he’s actually into Will? I mean I would be, if I didn’t think of him as a brother.”

Will glanced at her, as did Price and Zeller. “Really?”

She looked back to him, giving him a slow once over. “Eh, maybe. Hard to tell,” she said, looking back to Molly. A hard look crept into her eyes, one Will was familiar with. Though it didn’t appear often. Bev was usually warm and bubbly, easy to befriend. It was easy to forget she grew up in the town, just like he did. Unlike him, she’d lived her entire life here. And if you don’t get out, you get hard or you die. “You think Dr. Lecter is playing with him?”

The idea made Will go cold.

Molly shook her head. “No. Well, I’m not sure. He’s unpredictable. I know he likes games, but also—”

“Playing with people would be considered rude,” Will said, looking at his fingers as they rubbed together. His voice shook a little. “It would be impolite and unprofessional.”

Molly toyed with the hem of her shirt. "He just makes me nervous, always has. That's all."

Maybe he should back out. Before he got into it too deep. He’d already been telling himself this was a bad idea and now Molly, who knew Hannibal better than he did, seemed wary of this. He could call. Say he had some personal thing come up. A client emergency. It would be easy. Though he dreaded the phone call. Maybe he’d have Molly call Hannibal’s office and leave a message about it.

“Will.”

Bev’s voice had him looking to her. Her face was soft, open. “You would know better than anyone if Dr. Lecter was playing around with you.”

Because of his empathy. But it wasn’t a magic trick. And it wasn’t infallible. “We both know how well I am at judging people.”

The past laid heavy between them, and an ugly frown twisted her lips. Anger was still there and guilt. Sadness. She was the one who helped put him back together after the last blow up. She wanted him happy, but she didn’t want him hurt again. Zeller and Price looked at each other, having heard pieces of the story. Molly looked completely lost. “Go to the dinner, see what he does,” Bev said, her voice soft. “He seems to like you, Will. Maybe you should give him a chance.”

“Yeah, we both know how well that worked out for me the last time.”

———

Winston sat quietly at Will’s feet as he locked his shop door, tugging on the door to make sure it was. Even in the early hours of the morning, it was still warm, but not sweltering. All the other shops around the area were already closed, except for the tobacco store on the corner, which was open all hours. The neon pink sign was the only light other than the decrypted street lights. Bev and the rest had already gone home almost twenty minutes ago. He needed to finish some accounting before locking up.

Clara, a senior in high school, stood outside of the store vaping. Her blonde hair was pulled into a braid and dark circles sat under her eyes. She was thin, the hoodie she wore almost hanging off her shoulders. “Hey, Mr. Will,” she called, leaning her head back against the brick wall. “That’s a nice coat you got there.”

Will glanced down at the coat Hannibal had given him draped over his arms. He had debated leaving it in his office. It was less likely to get covered in dog hair there. Running a finger down the hem, he nodded in thanks. “Thanks.”

“Looks expensive. Your work booming that much?”

“It was a gift.”

“So, work isn’t that busy. Wanna give me that tattoo now then?”

“When you’re eighteen, Clara.”

She snorted, “Spoil sport.” It had been his answer for almost a year now, since she started working at the store. She wanted fairy wings on her back. Because one day, she was going to “fly” out of this city. And she was no angel, but fairies were mischievous enough. “So, in like three months. Not that it matters. People don’t really care about that stuff,” she said, shaking her vape at him before shoving it in her shorts pocket. “Hi Winston.”

He paused, looking at her again. Winston had darted over to say hello, licking all over her hands as she bent down to pet him. When he could afford it, he had her walk his dogs. They needed the exercise and she needed the money. He knew it all went to her schooling. Speaking of which, “What are you even doing working this time of night? You have school tomorrow.”

“Yep.” She popped the ‘p’ as she stood from loving on Winston and crossed her arms. She wore shorts and an oversized hoodie that hid the knife and bear spray she kept in her back pocket. “I work till 7:30.”

It was just before four. “Christ, Clara. You should be in bed.”

She shook her head, backing up towards the entrance of the store. “Not like I’d be sleeping. Mom’s working.”

Will fought the wince. Her mom had to work as a prostitute and regularly brought men back to their apartment. Will knew they fought about that. Clara wanted her mom to take them somewhere else. It wasn’t safe for multiple reasons. But her mom couldn’t afford the hotel rates and wouldn’t do it outside for fear of the cops picking them up.

Will never commented on either side when Clara brought it up to him. She didn’t want his input. She wanted someone to listen and not judge. So, that’s what he did.

“Figure if I’m not gonna sleep anyways, I might as well get paid for it,” she laughed as she ran back through the door before Will could say anything back. Winston stared at it for a

moment before padding back over to Will. He's loyal, but he'd never pass up a chance to get his ear scratched.

Will sighed, rubbing one of his earrings, fiddling with his keys in the other hand. There wasn't anything he could do for her. "Com'on boy, we need sleep."

Turning, he headed for the alley. He craved his bed by this point. And Tylenol. His neck and back ached from being bent over most of the day. He needed the work, but he was going to be permanently bent in a question mark shape by the time he was forty.

The alley was always dark at night. There were no lights other than Will's phone when he used it as a flashlight. After catching his toe on the dumpster one night and face planting into concrete, he always pulled out his phone. He had a hell of time explaining the bruising to Bev. It was either face getting made fun of, or tie Bev down so she didn't go on a head hunt.

His answer had been to avoid her till the bruising had almost completely disappeared.

Focused on getting his phone out, Will didn't realize that he wasn't alone till Winston started to growl.

His head snapped up to see the silhouettes of two people coming toward him in the alley. It was too dark to make out much about them other than that they were on the taller side, broad, and both men. They looked to be wearing hoodies, or some sort of jacket over them. All that mattered is that they were both bigger than him. Even with Winston, he couldn't handle both of them.

Will shushed Winston, moving to the side to let the men through, but he felt their shift when he did. They weren't just walking through the alley. They were after him.

"Oi, you Will Graham?" asked one of the men as they closed the distance between them, confirming the fear that had been crawling up his throat.

Get to the street. That's where the light is and that's where it's more likely for someone to see him in need of help. He didn't answer their question. Instead, he turned around, ready to bolt but there was another man already blocking his way. He turned so his back was to the wall and backed away, Winston snarling at his feet. Three against one were not good odds.

"Hey, I asked you a question? You deaf or just dumb?"

Will shoved his phone back in his pocket and grabbed his gun. Yanking it out, he went to point it at the guy blocking his exit, but a grip of iron wrapped around his wrist, wrenching it to the side. Squeezing the trigger, two shots went off before his wrist was twisted far enough he was forced to drop it. Deaf and blind, he grappled with the man, earning two punches to the gut, even as he landed one of his own to the man's chest.

A punch to the face sent him reeling, pain exploding along his jaw and cheekbone.

A sharp inhale of pain was all Will allowed himself before he blindly swung his other hand, bashing it into the man's face, trying to rake his keys into the skin. A grunt and then Will was

grabbed by the hair, his face smashed sideways into the wall, being held there.

Moist, hot breath hit his ear, the fingers tightening in his hair as the man said, “You shouldn’t have meddled in affairs that weren’t your business, Mr. Graham. Our boss is very upset with you.”

Fighting the urge to wretch at the man's breath, Will took a steadying breath before slamming his head sideways, catching the man off guard. His head rammed right into the man's nose. A crack resounded in his head as the bone of the man’s nose gave. Hot blood sprayed his face, and screams filled the alley. Winston had latched onto the man closest to the street's legs while Will had been plastered to the wall and was ripping into him. There was no telling where the third man was. It was too dark.

The fingers slipped out of his hair, but a foot to the knee sent Will to the ground. A bark of pain slipped out of him as he hit his knees. Another hit to the face sent him to his hands. The taste of iron flooded his mouth and blood dripped from his nose and lips.

A knee to his back was the only thing that held him down when a yelp from Winston echoed in the alley.

“Winston! Son of a bitch,” he snarled, his voice garbled on the blood. He tried to throw the man off. He wanted to check on Winston. Make sure he was okay. But a hand to his neck shoved his face into the concrete, holding him down. A kick to his ribs ripped another cry from him.

Something pressed to his temple.

The barrel of a gun.

“Now, listen here—”

“Hey! I’ve called the cops and I’ve got a sawed off shotgun,” a voice yelled, light suddenly flooding the alleyway. Clara. She must have heard the gunshots earlier. And there were sirens.

Cussing and then scuffling of feet. They must be running down the alley, though Will didn’t bother opening his eyes to check. The adrenaline hadn’t left him yet, but his lungs burned and his arms and legs shook like he’d already run for miles.

More footsteps, these getting closer, and then hands on his back. “You okay, Mr. Will? Can you hear me? Someone should be here soon to help,” Clara said, hands running up and down him. Probably trying to decide if any of the gunshots she’d heard earlier had been directed at him.

A soft groan left him. No. He was not alright.

A cold nose nuzzled his cheek, with a high whine following. Cracking an eye open, he found Winston, a little bloody and hobbling a bit, standing at his head, checking on him. Will’s

eyesight was too blurry to make out how badly he was hurt. Gradually, he moved so he could bury his fingers of his good hand in his fur, letting the texture and warmth ground him.

Clara kept talking, and the sirens got closer, but Will just held onto Winston, letting him lick his face in an attempt to clean him. He really just wanted his bed. And Tylenol.

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

Soooo. Who wants to take bets on what Hannibal's reaction is going to be when he finds out? Any takers?

Freddie-Fucking-Lounds

Chapter Summary

Aftermath of Will's beating

Chapter Notes

This chapter started to get really long, so I basically cut it in half.

There are also a lot of characters coming into play at one point, so please let me know if anything ever gets confusing! Though that stands for at any point while you're reading. It makes sense to me, but as the author that's a given.

Not beta read.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will didn’t let the ambulance take him to the hospital. When the preliminary check by the medics on scene was done, he refused to go anywhere but a vet hospital. Clara had fought him, but he refused to budge. His life wasn’t in danger, and Winston needed immediate attention. Clara basically gave up at the point. They both knew he'd never budge on Winston's health.

Winston had stayed glued to Will's leg as the medics checked him. Only a steady hand rubbing his head kept Winston from growling at the strangers. He didn't want anyone else near his human after everything that had happened. Will could feel him vibrating under his hand, but he wasn’t sure if it was due to fear, pain, or anxiety. It was likely all three.

Will gave his statement to the police, which wasn’t much since he hadn’t been able to see anything. Clara had been more helpful. Apparently they were middle aged, two white men and a black man, dressed in hoodies and washed out jeans. The only thing Will could tell them, but didn’t, was that the men who’d attacked him had been mafia affiliated. The moment the police learned that they wouldn’t pursue it any further.

Will said he didn’t know why he was attacked. That it was probably just an opportunity they saw for an easy mugging. Which was easy to believe considering how thin he was. In the end, the police figured it’d been that and they told him they'd keep an eye out for the group. Which means they wouldn’t and that this would be the end of it. Either way, they wouldn’t do anything with it, but if he mentioned the mafia, it would put *him* on their watchlist. Which was a headache. Lucky for him, Clara had scooped up his gun before the police arrived and

had stashed it somewhere. That kept Will from being grilled by the cops. They always got itchy when firearms were involved. He needed to ask her where it was later. Once the police were done talking to him, Will hightailed it to the nearest emergency vet hospital to get Winston checked out. It was one of the few times that he had to use his truck.

Winston needed stitches for a stab wound to one of his back legs. Thankfully, there was only one and nothing had been broken during the attack. Minor scratches that didn't need anything but to be cleaned and watched. The stitches required shaving that area and putting a cone around Winston's head to keep him from messing with it. Hen gave Will the most pitiful look when the vet fitted the cone around his neck. Will just kissed his head in thanks and comfort.

The bill made Will glad he hadn't listened to Clara. He wouldn't have been able to afford both a vet bill and a hospital bill.

Now, back at home, he eased himself down on his bed with a groan. The stag stood in the corner, watching him with sharp, dark eyes. It snorted at his state, lifting a hoof to paw the floor in irritation. Will barely noticed it. Exhaustion pulled at every inch of him. Everywhere hurt, but his wrist throbbed and his face ached the worst. Winston had limped his way to his dog bed when they walked in and was now curled up on his bed with a heavy sigh. The others had taken turns going back and forth between them to check on them.

His alarm clock blinked a lazy *Wednesday, eight twenty-three* at him.

Usually, he'd be on his way to *Royale* by this point, but he'd already called Jack while he was at the vet hospital. When he told him that he needed the day off, it was met with lots of huffing and puffing and threats of getting fired. But Will had held firm. He wasn't going in. He was too tired and too sore to deal with the diner today. Jack had relented in the end, with a halfhearted 'glad you're okay' before he hung up.

Will just wanted to sleep.

He sagged a little further forward, his shoulders folding in under the exhaustion. The coat laid in his lap, his fingers tracing over the grime that now stained the material. One of the cops had picked it up when they arrived and handed it back to him. He couldn't even remember when he dropped it.

One of the buttons was missing now. Will kept running his thumb over the area it was supposed to be. It had probably rolled under one of the trash bins. An overgrown rat had probably already run off with it. Another was barely hanging on.

Looking at it made a sob crawl up his throat. Will wanted to throw it in the trash, and never look at it again. It was worthless by this point. There was no fixing the amount of damage that it had sustained. He could never wear it, but he didn't want to get rid of it. The idea made him just as sick as looking at its current state did. He fisted the material, bringing it up to his nose to take a deep breath. It mostly smelled of dirt and a little of trash, but underneath it, there was the faint scent of Hannibal's cologne still clinging to it. He felt something tight unwind in his chest at the smell.

He couldn't throw it in the trash.

When he finally had the energy to move again, Will stood and pulled a hanger from his coat/broom closet. He hung it on the command hook that sat on the outside of his bathroom door where he usually put his towel.

He stared at it, taking in all the scuffs and stains. It was sad. He should probably put it in the closet with the rest of his coats. Something so beautiful had been ruined in a matter of hours after coming into his possession. Like most things in his life apparently. He snorted at the thought, turning away from the coat.

He moved to check on Winston, wincing as he bent down next to him. The vet had given him some pills to stave off infection, but he wouldn't need to give it to him till tonight. Scratching his ears, Will ran a gentle hand over his body, trying to offer what comfort he could.

He got licked in the mouth for his effort.

When the pain and exhaustion finally won, he stood and took some Ibuprofen. The stag had moved to the opposite corner. Too tired to bother with a shower, he shucked his shirt, shoes, and pants and crawled into bed, wincing in from the pain that shot up his bruised wrist. A belly deep groan left him as he flopped on his pillow, his muscles protesting from the movements. Sleep claimed him before he could pull the covers up.

"What the fuck happened?"

Bev was breathing fire. She followed hot on his heels as he walked back to the office, away from the curious eyes of the customers.

Molly had practically screamed when Will had shuffled in, without Winston. Despite the dog's insistence on following him back to the shop, Will had gently, but firmly, had him return to his dog bed when Will got up at five to get ready to leave. He'd whined, but complied, never taking his eyes off Will as Will finished getting ready and walked out the door. He needed to rest that leg.

Price and Zeller had both popped their heads out of their rooms at Molly's shriek, but Bev was the one who came running out, eyes widening in shock at the sight of Will.

Molly ran to him, her hands fluttering around him as she tried to decide whether she could touch him or not. "Oh Will, what happened?" she asked, her hands finally coming knot together in front of her. Those wide eyes roamed over him as Bev appeared next to her, her face sheet white and lips colorless. "You look like you were hit by a truck."

He felt it too. He was sure he created a pretty bleak picture, though he hadn't braved looking in the mirror yet. The left side of his face was probably black and purple, as was his nose. There was some swelling around his eye, but it didn't keep him from seeing. His wrist was definitely swollen, and he had some trouble breathing, but nothing to be concerned about.

He muttered it was nothing, overly conscious of the shock of his clients, before pushing past the women, with Bev refusing to let that be the end of it.

“And why aren’t you in the hospital?” she asked as he closed the door of his office behind them. He didn’t need any of his customers knowing what happened. It would be bad for business for multiple reasons.

“Because I can’t afford it.”

“That’s a load of shit. I know you keep an emergency fund, and this looks like a goddamn emergency to me.”

“I can’t afford it and a vet bill, Bev,” Will said, easing himself down in his chair, cradling his arm close. Any weight on his palms hurt. He scraped the skin off most of them during the fight. He hadn’t realized it though till he went to wash his hands later. Bev paused, watching him as he tried to get comfortable. “Winston got hurt trying to protect me. He needed medical attention.”

She pursed her lips, clearly debating on what to say next. Finally she settled on, “Protect you?”

“Got cornered by a group of men last night, after I closed up, in the alley. I got lucky. Clara heard the commotion and called the cops.”

“You were mugged?”

Will snorted. “Not quite. The unnatural disaster of Freddie-fucking-Lounds struck.”

It was obvious. No one but a handful of people knew about Abigail, and she was the only business he had ‘meddled’ in that would upset anyone. He’d known she’d be trouble from the look on her face when he’d fired her. He supposed he should be grateful that he was the only one who’d been hurt. So far.

Bev crossed her arms, hip cocked to the side. Her hair was hauled up into a high ponytail that swished back and forth with the motion. “Freddie? What does she have to do with this?”

“You recall her eavesdropping?”

Bev’s eyes flattened, becoming hard and cold. “I remember. I still don’t know why you waited so long to fire her.”

“Because finding a replacement has always proven to be a pain in the ass. But that's not the point. She overheard me and Hannibal and apparently took the information and sold it to the highest bidder. As in whoever wanted Abigail dead.”

Bev’s eyes widened briefly before sharpening again. She reached back to tug on her ponytail before she asked, “Did they want you dead?”

Will’s brows scrunched as he considered the question. Playing with his earrings, he shook his head. “They seemed to want to scare me more than anything,”

“And rough you up to prove a point?”

“That too.”

Bev opened her mouth, but the office door busted open and Zeller and Price fell in, practically shoving each other through, as they talked over one another.

“What happened?”

“Are you okay?”

“Have you been to the doctor yet?”

“Should we be concerned?”

“Bev, what did he—”

Will lifted a hand, silencing both of them before they really got going. The two men looked at him, and then to Bev like she knew all the answers.

“Freddie,” she said, her tone flat, like that name explained everything. Varying degrees of disgust twisted Price and Zeller’s faces.

“Wait, *Freddie* beat you up?” Zeller asked, his brows shooting up to his hairline. His statement wasn't correct, but Will couldn't argue it either. She was the reason he got beat up.

Price smacked him on the back of the head. “No, you dumbass. I doubt she’s a hundred pounds wet, there’s no way she did this.”

“Not like Will’s any different.”

“He’s *wiry.* All muscles. Not a spaghetti noodle like Freddie. Or you,” Price said, sniffing in disdain. Will wasn’t sure whether to be amused by this conversation or annoyed. He was not, in fact, wiry as Price had put it. While he did have some muscle from wrestling dogs and some light working out, he was more thin than anything. But he wasn’t about to correct him.

“Oh. Really?”

“Really. And I bet she hired guys to get back at Will for firing her.”

“That’s stupid,” Zeller said, finding his second wind in the fight. “She knew she was gonna get fired eventually. No way she didn’t with the way she strutted around causing problems.”

“That doesn’t mean she isn’t pissed at Will for doing it.”

“Well, I—”

Will looked at Bev as the bickering continued. This was her fault for not explaining things clearly and now he was stuck listening to them fight like grade schoolers. Seeing his building irritation and exhaustion, she snapped, “Enough. You’re both morons. Shut up and listen.”

Will eyed all three of them as they all turned to look at him, before he asked, “Don’t you guys have clients you should be with?”

From the glare he got from Bev, she wasn’t going to let him out of this that easily. And by the looks on Zeller and Price’s faces, neither were they. He was outnumbered and outmuscled.

Huffing a sigh, he leaned back in his seat, cradling his bad wrist again. “Abigail was attacked by suits.”

Price winced at the news. “Christ. Mafia? Talk about bad luck.”

Price would know better than most. He’d gotten into some bad deals with them in the past. He was clean now, but he had the scars as a reminder of his bad choices.

“And I killed them.” Bev had already suspected the connection, but she looked just as displeased about this way this was going as everyone else in the room. “I was talking to Hannibal about it—”

“And Freddie overheard you,” Zeller finished for him, groaning. “Boss, you seem to like to hog all the bad luck for yourself.”

“A sold the information to whoever sent the men,” Bev finished. Even if she didn’t know originally who sent them, she was nosy enough that it wouldn’t be hard to find out.

The four looked at each other. Freddie was probably the worst hire Will had ever made, which was saying something. And he suspected it would only get worse from here. But he didn’t want to think about it right now. Or ever. He hurt too much to deal with it. “There’s nothing we can do about that now, so you should all get back to work.”

Bev stepped forward even as the other two started to shuffle out. “You should go to the hospital.”

“Not gonna happen.”

“I can lend you the money, Will. It’s not that big a deal,” she insisted, getting ready to fight him on this.

He shook his head and when she opened her mouth to argue, he cut her off, “Bev, this is not up for discussion.”

“Like hell it isn’t.”

The snarled words had barely left her mouth when a knock at the door drew all their attention to Molly who was hunched in the doorway. Today she wore skinny jeans with a simple white top and a jean jacket. The jacket was clearly old, with it well worn in. It was probably a leftover from her teenage years if Will had to guess. Her hair hung loose around. It was frizzy and tousled, both from the weather and sudden stress.

“Um, I’m sorry, but your customers are getting anxious. They’re asking me what’s going on. Should I tell them to go home?”

“Ye—”

“No,” Will said, voice harsh, as he cut off Bev. “Everyone is going to go back to work, and you are to tell the clients that they know the rules. No questions. But I do need you to reschedule all my appointments for the time being. With this,” he lifted his purple wrist in emphasis, “I can’t risk tattooing anyone right now.”

She nodded, eyes widening at the injury. “Do you need anything else? Ice, Tyelonol? Should I call anyone?”

Her motherly side was showing again. So was Bev’s, but Molly at least had a kid.

“Yes.”

“ *No,”* Will spoke over Bev again, who glared at him. “No. Thank you, Molly. I’ve already taken some medicine for the pain and I don’t need anything else.”

They stared down one another as Molly straightened stepped forward, moving past Zeller and Price, to stand between them. “Alright. I’ll call all your appointments and move them around. Do you know when you’ll be able to…” she hesitated, eyes sliding back to his hand, which really was a horrendous color.

“Move them back a week,” Will said, gaze sliding back to her so they rested just past her ear. A week should be enough time for his hand to heal. If nothing else happens to it.

“What about next Friday?” Molly asked, her tone landing somewhere between professional and mom. Will had the distinct impression she was handling this like she would handle a situation if Wally was fighting. “Should I contact Dr. Lecter and let him know you won’t be attending?”

It was a tempting idea. Will could easily get out of the dinner party. It was a viable excuse. Due to his injury, he had to push back appointments so he couldn’t make it. He was all booked up and it would be unprofessional to make his clients wait any longer.

Bev put her foot down on this one though. “No. Will is going to go, even if I have to dress him myself.”

Molly sensed the raising hostility between the two and decided to appease Bev, who looked close to murder by this point. “Alright, I’ll keep Friday clear then.”

“And Will is going to see the doctor today and then going home to rest, so I’ll be locking up.”

“That’s not happening Bev,” he said, rising to his feet. He didn’t like having to look up at her. Zeller and Price shifted uncomfortably. “I’m not going to the hospital and I’m not going home. I’ll go stir crazy if you make me, and I’ll end up right back here.”

She opened her mouth to cut her off, but Will spoke before she could. “Drop it. It’s not happening, and you won’t change my mind, so you might as well go back to work.” His tone made it clear that he wouldn’t talk about this further.

She gave him the evil eye, mouth tightening till it almost disappeared, before swooping out of his office, leaving Zeller and Price glancing between them nervously. Molly wrung her hands together, unsure what to do. Will waved them off and they walked out, Molly shutting the door behind them.

Finally alone, Will lowered himself back to his seat, slumping down in it. His body ached. Bev was right, he should go to the hospital, but there was no way that was happening. Too much money, too many people watching. He was sure whoever sent those thugs after him would have people watching for him there too. He wasn't about to hand himself over on a silver platter.

He didn't think they wanted to kill him, but they'd want to make an example out of him. In some ways, that was worse. All because of Freddie-fucking-Lounds. She'd gone from a pain in the ass to a full on threat.

Exhaustion lulled him into dozing before he knew it, his mind wandering off. With his wrist the way it was, he had no desire for paperwork. He certainly couldn't go out and tattoo people. Anxiety was building in his gut. He couldn't work at the diner. Not unless his wrist magically got better. The shop wasn't bringing in enough for him to solely rely on that for his income.

He should probably have Bev adopted out the dogs she could, though it felt wrong. But with the prices the way they were, and now the hand the way it was, he wasn't sure he could afford to keep them all. Not if he wanted to eat too. And then there were the bills to keep his shop going. Ink was getting more expensive along with everything else. He'd have to raise his prices soon because of it, which was liable to drive people away.

And with the inflation of prices, his employees really needed a raise. Molly was raising a kid. Price was trying to pay off the loans on his house. Zeller was saving to get a new car, since his could bite the dust any day now. Will had already fixed it twice for him now. But it was a lot like Will's shoes: old and holding together with duct tape and sheer stubbornness. And Bev had been here longer than any of the others. Honestly, she and Will both needed long vacations.

She'd go to the beach, but he'd go to the mountains. Somewhere with a good trout stream where he could fly fish all day. He'd go West. Take his time. Stop and see weird attractions probably. He'd take Winston, but he'd need to either find a dog sitter or new homes for the others. Except maybe Max. He might keep Max so that Winston has a buddy. Just get away from all of this.

Going on a vacation was just a dream for now though. He couldn't give them raises. Like most things right now, he couldn't afford it.

A soft knock interrupted his spiraling thoughts.

He huffed, already knowing who it was and didn't open his eyes as he said, "Bev, I told you this isn't up for discussion. I'm not going to see a doctor."

He knew she wouldn’t give up that easily. She was just as stubborn as he was when it came to things like his health. It’s why they’d been fighting over his diet for the last five years. He should probably tell her why he was being so stubborn, but then she’d just get overprotective and things would get out of hand. Though he had thought she’d wait till after they’d closed the store before getting into another fight with him.

“Then I guess it’s a good thing I came to you, William, seeing the state you are in.”

There was no mistaking the soft, accented voice. Will vaulted up out of his chair at the unexpected arrival of Hannibal Lecter.

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

Next up, Will's treatment by our handsome cannibalistic doctor and said doctors reaction to this whole fiasco. It's gonna be absolutely lovely, if I do say so myself. I can't wait. Whoo-hooooo here we go

An Unwanted House Call

Chapter Summary

Hannibal gets a call, Will get's a doctor's visit.

Chapter Notes

I usually take a break between writing chapters, but like I said, I cut the last one in half. I was already on a roll and just kept rollin.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal had just closed the door behind his patient Mrs. Hallowitz when his office phone rang. It had been an overall uninteresting session. Her self confidence had taken a plunge with her husband's affair. Being married for over twenty years, she didn't know what to do. She knew he was seeing someone else, what she didn't know was that it was another man. One who had just turned eighteen. No amount of primping would win his interest back. Hannibal had hinted at this, but he was waiting to see what would happen when she found out.

Being married to a wealthy and prominent politician, it was only a matter of time before things got interesting again. There was the question of what she would do with the information when she found out.

He picked up the phone, expecting it to be a patient who either needed to cancel or schedule another appointment.

"Dr. Lecter," Beverly Katz greeted when he answered, breathing hard. It sounded as though she was ready to take a swing at someone. Or that she already had. "This is Beverly from Will's tattoo shop."

Surprise and then curiosity curled through him at the sound of her voice.

Will. A name that had not been far from his thoughts since their first meeting. Now he had him coming over for dinner next Friday. It would be a perfect opportunity to destable him with the presence of strangers and then act as his anchor, gradually winning the wary tattooist over.

"I remember you Ms. Katz," Hannibal said as he lowered himself in his office chair. He figured the only reason she would be calling him was if it had something to do with Will. She

had proven to be an asset in his mission to get closer to William. “How can I help you?”

There was a pause. Hannibal could hear footsteps and then a shutting of a door. There was an echo of a door being locked. It sounded as though Ms. Katz had moved to a bathroom.

“Dr. Lecter, Molly said that you were a doctor in a hospital before you became a psychiatrist,” Ms. Katz said tersely. Footsteps sounded again on the other end, but this time, it was pacing. There was a rhythmic step-step-pause. "That you were her husband's doctor when he got sick."

“That is correct.”

“I was wondering if it would be possible if you could swing by the shop this evening. After you’ve finished with anything you already have planned. I understand if you can’t, but you see we have a small emergency here. And it would really—”

“Ms. Katz,” Hannibal interrupted, bringing her to an abrupt halt. He normally found it excessively rude to interrupt another, but it sounded as though Ms. Katz was well on her way to a meltdown. Her voice was pitched too high and with every word she was speaking faster. He wanted to stop her before she fell apart and he had to soothe her so he could understand why she called. He found himself disappointed that this was not in fact about Will. “Ms. Katz, if you are having a medical emergency, I would recommend you go to the hospital, rather than calling me. I’m afraid you’d have to wait another two hours, and I’m no longer a practicing physician.”

“But you are licensed,” Ms. Katz said, huffing into the phone. It sounded more out of irritation than anything else, and Hannibal sensed that it wasn’t directed at him. He wondered what had her so riled. Their last two encounters had shown her to be a bubbly, polite lady.

“Yes.”

Another deep breath and then the sound of a toilet lid being put down. “Dr. Lecter, it’s Will. He got attacked last night—”

Hannibal felt something short circuit in his brain momentarily. An irritation washed through him that was greater than he’d expected. He took a breath, controlling himself. He willed calm to creep back in. He looked down to see his hands gripping the arm of his chair so tightly his knuckles were white. Slowly, he relaxed them, letting his muscle unwind.

He rarely let himself get so out of sorts. This was a new sensation.

“—and he refuses to go to the hospital. I’ve tried to convince him, but he’s put his foot down. Says he can’t afford it since he took Winston to the vet hospital because he got injured in the fight. And normally, I wouldn’t ask this, but he really needs to see a doctor and Molly said you could help.”

Hannibal had to work to unclench his jaw, rising to his feet to begin gathering the necessary equipment he’d need. “What happened, Ms. Katz? I need to know the nature of his injuries in order to know what to bring in order to best help him.”

“He won’t tell me how badly he’s hurt. He keeps insisting he’s fine. But, his wrist looks swollen. And it looks like he took a few hits to the face.”

The wrist was probably sprained. It should have been wrapped immediately after it was injured, but he would do what he could to help correct the damage. He pulled out his medical bag he kept stored in one of the cabinets in his office and opened it to see what was in it. Bandages, burn ointment, needle, suturing thread. There probably wasn’t much he could do for Will’s face other than prescribing him meds to help with the pain. Though, what he knew of the tattooist meant that Will was unlikely to even go and get the prescription. He would claim it cost too much.

A deep breath sounded on the other end of the line. Hannibal guess that Ms. Katz was trying not to cry. Deciding to keep her distracted so he wouldn’t have to deal with that, Hannibal asked, “You said he was attacked. Was he mugged?”

Air wooshed in the line, like she was shaking her head, and then she said, “Um, sorry. No. Neither. It was Freddie Lounds. Freddie-fucking-Lounds. The parasite that continues to plague even after it’s left.”

Freddie Lounds. That was not a name Hannibal was expecting Ms. Katz to utter. He paused in the middle of checking his bag, his mind whirling with the multiple scenarios of how she would fit into this equation. The irritation that was coiled in his chest morphed into something far uglier.

“She told one of the mafia groups about Will saving Abigail, and it turns out they weren’t too pleased about it. Put a hit out on him or something. Will said they just want to make an example out of him, not kill him, but I don’t believe him. The best messages are sent with dead bodies. The Chesapeake Ripper is proof of that,” Ms. Katz continued, snorting into the phone, before Hannibal could prompt her for more information.

Her praise of his work would normally make him preen, proud of the impact his artwork had, but all he felt was seething rage. Someone broke the rules. Will was on the No Harms list. He wasn’t even supposed to be approached by anyone other than Hannibal and his men without his permission.

Someone was going to pay the price for messing with what was his.

Seeing everything he’d need for his housecall to Will, he shut his bag with a snap. “Don’t worry Ms. Katz. I’ll head that way as soon as I finish with my last patient. I should be there in less than two hours, though I would recommend not telling Will that I’m coming.”

She laughed. “Right. He’s likely to run before you can see him.”

“And we wouldn’t want that, now would we?”

“Nope. No, we wouldn’t, Dr. Lecter. See you in a few hours,” she said before hanging up.

Hannibal looked at the phone, and then his clock. Ten till six. Should be enough time to make a phone call before his other patient showed up.

Taking a seat behind his desk, he pulled out his other work phone. Freddie may be the one with the information, but she wasn't the one who put out the hit. And last he checked, she was with the Maestro group, but Tobais didn't strike Hannibal as the idiotic type. Prideful, yes. Stupid, that had yet to be seen.

Tobais would know that he didn't have the manpower to take on the Ripper Mafia. He would lose before the fight even began. Especially with the little spat he's in the middle of with the Dynasty group. You will never win a two-front war. History has taught humanity that.

So that left Hannibal with the question of who decided they could just do whatever they wanted because they felt like it.

He dialed the number and waited for his man to pick up.

"Sir?" Barney answered in less than three rings. He was always polite and prompt.

"Mr. Matthews, I'm afraid I need you to do some things for me. Someone laid their hands on Will and I need you to figure out who it was. I also need you to bring me the men who attacked him. I want them alive," Hannibal said pleasantly, leaning back to cross his ankle over his knee. He was already running through the various things he would do to them. One to get the truth, but also to make them pay for the pain they inflicted on his tattooist.

They would be strung up. As a fair warning to their employer so that they knew Hannibal was coming for them.

"Of course sir. Is Mr. Graham alright?" asked Barney.

Hannibal sighed, glancing at the clock. Three minutes until Mr. Lonlard's appointment. "I believe so, but I will be personally checking in on him soon. Someone does not wish to play by the rules. I want men stationed around Will at all times until this matter is resolved. I do not want a scratch on him. Is that understood, Mr. Matthews?"

"Understood sir."

"One last thing," Hannibal said, standing as he readied to meet his last client of the day. He rebuttoned his jacket, checking his reflection in the mirror that sat behind his desk.

"Yes sir?"

"Send out a message that Freddie Lounds has a price on her head. Alive and brought to the Ripper group. Dead, and whoever killed her will suffer the punishment that would have been hers. Anyone harboring her will be considered the enemy of the Chesapeake Ripper."

"Very good, sir," Barney said before he hung up.

Hannibal stretched his neck, putting his phone back on his desk. The clock read six on the dot. Moving around his desk, he went to welcome Mr. Lonlard.

The world swayed a little as Will shot to his feet.

He found Hannibal standing in his office doorway, holding a worn leather bag in one hand and his oxford burgundy suit jacket draped over the other. His ash blond hair was combed back like everytime Will had seen him. He wore a pearl white shirt and a deep blue tie.

He looked out of place in the cramped room where Will had spent most of his life.

Now at his feet, Will wasn't sure what to do. Glancing down, he realized he had no idea what time it was. How long had he been resting? Had to be late, if Hannibal was here. That or he was hallucinating again. Which was entirely possible.

"Will?" Hannibal called when Will continued to look bewilderedly around the office, like he was trying to place himself. "Are you okay, Will?"

Those blue eyes shot up to his face, stopping around his nose. He didn't move around to greet the doctor, but he didn't sit back down either. He seemed to be resting in a limbo, but seeing Hannibal seemed to ground him somewhat. "Hannibal? What are you doing here?"

"Ms. Katz called me. She said you'd gotten hurt and needed medical attention. She also told me that you had no intention of going to the hospital for your injuries. I was asked to make a housecall," he said, moving further into the room so he could gently close the door. He could smell the sweet, overripe scent of a fever beginning to set in for Will. He wasn't surprised given the extent of the injuries he'd sustained.

Moving closer, he circled the desk so that he could get a better view of that tattooist. Will seemed more confused about his presence than put out. His confusion made it easier for Hannibal to maneuver him back into his seat with relatively no fuss from him.

With a quick glance, Hannibal found most of the injuries superficial, other than the wrist. And Will seemed to be having some difficulty breathing, which was worrying but not concerning.

Hannibal set his bag on the desk, flicking it open, before setting his jacket next to it and knelt down in front of Will.

The sight of the doctor on his knees roused Will straight to his feet again, alarm ringing through him. There was something inherently wrong with the refined man being on his knees. "Wh-what are you doing? Hannibal?"

Hannibal grabbed the elbow of his injured wrist before Will could back away. "Please, Will," he said, keeping his voice low. Will looked spooked enough as it was. "Sit. I need to examine you, and while I can do it with you standing, you'll be more comfortable sitting."

It took some time, but Hannibal eventually got him to sit back down. Though it was closer to a collapse. Will's body was too tired and hurt to put up much of a fight.

"This seems excessive," Will muttered, curling his arm around his waist to try and hide his bad hand as Hannibal ran a quick hand over him, looking for any critical injuries. Will found

his wrist was too stiff to bend. “There was no need for you to come here.”

Hannibal let Will hide the injury for now, but reached up to look at his face.

“Nonsense, you were injured, I can offer help,” said Hannibal, trying to catch his gaze, as his fingers brushed against his face. When Will refused to look anywhere in his vicinity, he continued, “What is excessive is your refusal to take care of yourself.”

Will flinched both at the unexpected brush of fingers on his chin to hold him steady and the words. He was too aware of Hannibal’s soft breathing as the doctor leaned up under the pretense of getting a better look at the swollen and discolored flesh. Hannibal’s eyesight was better than most, even in the poor lighting of Will’s office, but he also saw an excuse to get closer. He knew the tattooist would put distance between them again at the first chance.

Will tensed under his hands as Hannibal coaxed his head to tilt this and that, checking for damage to the range of motion. He then ran his thumbs over Will’s nose, frowning at the bruising, but grateful it wasn’t broken, before they swept up over the busted eyebrow and down the swollen cheek. Will winced when Hannibal’s hands prodded his eyebrow. Hannibal noted that his eye, which refused to look anywhere but down, was a little red, but nothing that needed medical attention.

Satisfied in what he found, he moved his attention elsewhere. The injured hand was still tucked snuggly against Will’s waist.

As Hannibal checked him over, Will fought to keep his thoughts anywhere but on the kneeling man in front of him. He could feel the heat rolling off himself from the harsh flush that was creeping up his neck towards his ears. He didn’t know if Hannibal was too focused on his task to notice or if he was simply too polite. The doctor was too observant not to have noticed, so it was probably the latter.

He was divided in what he wanted to do. He wanted to run away from the doctor. From the emotions that the man seemed to invoke in Will whenever he was around. He knew what would happen if he let himself give to his feelings. He’d learned that lesson several times over. He didn’t want to suffer because of it anymore.

But Will was tired. He was tired of running and hiding and avoiding. He was tired of always having to put walls around people so he didn’t hurt them and they couldn’t hurt him. It was a constant game of dancing around others and what they needed him to do. And it was exhausting to never just be. And Hannibal had made it clear that that was all he wanted from him.

That was terrifying.

Will jumped when warm fingers wrapped around the arm that was wrapped around himself. His skin tingled where Hannibal's hand rested. It was as though all his senses had been dialed to eleven, making him hyper aware of everything when it came to Hannibal. Like the fact that his hands were soft. There were no calluses roughing them. He smelled of books, ink, and a cologne that was out of Will’s budget. And if Will leaned forward a few inches, he could rest his head on Hannibal’s, or on his shoulders that looked broad enough to suggest some sort of

exercise. His breathing was deep, if a little too deep. Like his emotions were running high, even though none showed on that impassive face, and that he was trying to keep them steady.

Will's thoughts were spiraling in a million different directions as Hannibal pried his hand gently, but firmly, away so that he could turn it to get a better look.

"How well can you move it?" Hannibal asked, as Will's brows pinch in pain as he rotated it.

Will's eyes slid to the side, towards the drawer that had his cheap whiskey, before coming back to rest around Hannibal's shoulder. "Not well. I can, but it's stiff and aches so I try not to," he said, pausing before saying, "And I take care of myself." He did the best he could anyways.

Hannibal paused, fingers halting in the squeezing of his wrist, maroon eyes shooting up to Will's face. His lips flattened briefly and Will stiffened. That had been displeasure. It was one of the few emotions he hadn't seen on the man's face until now.

"We both know that isn't true, now is it William."

Hannibal's words were soft, like he was trying to take the bite out, but they still stung

Seeing the hurt flash through those blue ocean-like eyes, Hannibal settled himself lower on the ground, moving his hands so they rested on Will's knees, earning him eye contact. "You have dark circles under your eyes, telling me you have not slept, or not slept well, in some time. Your skin is sallow, which tells me how little you are able to get out of work, as well as how much your body is suffering. And you clearly miss meals. Your stress keeps you from eating, which keeps you from sleeping, which increases your emotional responses to adverse situations, raising your stress levels."

"In other words, I'm in a vicious cycle," Will tried to joke, his voice cracking. He wanted to move his legs out from under Hannibal's hands. His warmth had seeped through his jeans and now felt like it was scalding his skin. His own hands hovered between pulling Hannibal's hands off or laying his own on top of them. He settled with having them curl into fists on his lap.

Hannibal's fingers tightened on Will's knees, trying to get him to look at him again. "Yes, and one your body cannot maintain for long. I am concerned for your health and wellbeing."

Hannibal started to lean in closer, his chest almost brushing Will's knees, but the tattooist suddenly disappeared from under his hands. He'd shot his chair back and was up, spinning around till he was facing Hannibal with the chair between them. His good hand gripped the back of it while his injured one was held against his chest.

"You're concerned about me? You don't even know me," Will snapped, eyes on Hannibal's knees which were still on the ground. He just wanted Hannibal to get up and leave. To get out of his life and out of his mind. "You're just a psychiatrist who happened to be able to help a girl find her way home. We don't mean anything to one another."

Hannibal quirked an eyebrow at the blatant show of distancing. Will wanted to run, but the predator in him wanted to fight back against what was an obvious attack on the walls he'd erected to protect himself. Hannibal took his time getting to his feet, brushing off the dirt from his knees. He couldn't rush this. If he did, Will would take off. While he was confident in his ability to track down prey, Will was unpredictable. He was one of the few people Hannibal wasn't sure he'd be able to catch if Will put his mind to escaping.

Straightening, Hannibal looked at Will, his lips tilting up in amusement. The tattooist's ears were an endearing shade of red. "Or we could socialize like adults. God forbid we become friendly."

That got him a glare. Will didn't appreciate his teasing . He eyed the doctor who closed the distance between them till only the chair separated them.

"I don't find you all that interesting, Dr. Lecter."

Mirth twinkled in Hannibal's eyes. He took Will's good hand, brushing a thumb over the top of his hand. He waited till Will looked up at him, and now even his cheeks were beginning to go pink, before he said, "You will. Now, let me wrap that wrist, and then we can see what else we can do to help your health."

Chapter End Notes

Next up, Dr. Lecter is very concerned with Will's health. What's a house call without visiting the patient's house? Well, to Hannibal, an incomplete visit.

A Home Cooked Meal

Chapter Summary

Hannibal cooks for well and then puts him to bed. No, not that *bed.* Get your heads out of the gutter.

Chapter Notes

I am really, really sorry for taking so long to post another chapter. These last two months have not been good to my family. We've had a few hospitalizations. Bleh. So, my head has not been in the game. I haven't written in basically two months, so hopefully this chapter isn't too rough.

Not beta read

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal, like Will, was not easily deterred. Will would call him pigheaded. Hannibal would call himself steadfast. The result was the same.

After he'd seen to Will's wrist, and other various scrapes, he demanded the tattooist return home for proper rest. His demands resulted in an argument that started as quickly as it began.

"Hannibal, I don't need bedrest."

"I never said you needed to be bedrested. But rest will help you recover fast."

"I can't sleep."

"I am aware, so I have considered possible solutions. The easiest, and probably the one that will work best, is a proper meal and some pain meds. Not eating and overwork can cause sleep problems. The pain meds will help as well."

"I can't afford them."

They stared at each other, neither saying anything. By this point they were both standing on either ends of the desk. Every time Hannibal worked his way around, Will edged his way to the opposite side. It was as if they were playing an unproclaimed game of tag.

Reaching out, Hannibal pulled out a small orange and white bottle from his medical bag that still rested on the desk. He set it in the space between them with a small twitch of his

eyebrow. Without saying anything, the message was abundantly clear. Whatever objections Will could have would be met head on by Hannibal.

Glaring at the bottle, Will's lips pressed into a hard line. "I don't need a babysitter."

Hannibal tilted his head slightly, eyes narrowing on the tattooist, as he folded his hands in front of him. Even in the dim lighting of this abysmal room, Will didn't look good. It became increasingly clear in the short time Hannibal had known him that Will didn't prioritize self care very high. If Hannibal wanted him safe and well cared for, he'd have to do it himself.

"How about a friend?"

Will snorted, eyes darting up to look at the doctor. The look on Hannibal's face killed any amusement that'd been building in his chest.

Those dark eyes were solemn. Concern and warmth radiated from them.

Will flinched, eyes dropping to his hands. His right was wrapped up tightly. All the scrapes he'd gotten had been cleaned. It hadn't taken long for Hannibal to tend to him, but it had drug on too. Will had been stuck sitting stiff as a board as he waited for him to finish.

Finally after a moment, Will said, "I think Bev might have some objections. She's already claimed that spot."

"I do not doubt she is a loyal one, but no one ever said you cannot have more than one friend William. I simply wish to be counted among them."

Will didn't know what to say. He'd never had very many friends. Most of the kids he'd grown up with found him weird. He'd been ostracized for most of his school years. Bev was the closest he got. Price and Zeller were more like the weird cousins every family had and didn't know what to do with. He hadn't known Molly long, but she was more of a mother hen than a friend. The only other person he'd ever considered a friend had just used him.

Hannibal was different.

He felt like neither a friend nor a stranger. He also didn't strike someone who had friends. Associates, colleagues, and acquaintances. But not friends. Will's brain didn't know where to place him. Which ended up being fine because Bev came bursting into the office.

"Well? All better?" she asked, hands on her hips as she looked Will up and down. She'd been pacing the hallway for the last hour. Molly had overseen from the front desk. Price and Zeller had only given each other varying looks of alarmed but left her alone. She'd clocked them enough times in the past for them to know when to stay away.

"Ye—"

"William will be taking the rest of the day off. And the next day as well. His body needs rest and you can consider this doctor's orders," Hannibal said, smoothly interjecting before Will could say anything. Ms. Katz would help him in maneuvering Will.

He snapped his medical bag closed, ignoring the sharp look he was getting from Will.

Bev smiled widely, nodding once. “No problem. I’ll see you in a few days, Will.”

She didn’t even hesitate to throw him under the bus. “Bev. I’m not taking time off. I need to get things done—”

“I’ll have Molly take care of everything,” she said and then turned to look at Hannibal. “She’s very capable. How on earth did you convince her to work here? I need to learn those tricks.”

A secret smile played around the corners of Hannibal’s lips. Will watched them twitch, feline amusement appearing there, his hands resting on his leather bag. It didn’t seem to matter what Hannibal did, he always appeared graceful and composed. “I’m afraid that is a trade secret, so I will answer only ‘yes’ or ‘no.’”

Bev laughed before shouting “See you later!” to Will and flounced out so he couldn’t argue about it. Will would bet anything she was going out to tell the others that he was leaving. They would take Hannibal’s side on this.

What a pain in the ass.

———

In the end, it was Molly who pushed him out the door. She hadn’t even waited five minutes after Bev left before she came into the office and basically bustled him right out of his own shop, Hannibal in tow. She’d given him a kind ‘good-bye, see you later’ and slammed the door shut after him. She’d even gone so far as to lock the door so he couldn’t walk back in.

That was how both he and Hannibal were now standing in front of the door to his apartment.

The doctor had refused to go until he was certain Will would follow through with his orders. He said he wouldn’t put it past him to go to the restaurant. When Will had given him a quizzical look at how he knew about his second job, Hannibal said that Bev had warned him. After that, they fought about him following Will. Well, Will argued, Hannibal had given simple rebuttals.

It went similarly to how the conversation went about bedrest.

“Hannibal, I don’t need you to follow me home.”

“I never said you did, but I’m concerned about you. I’d like to make sure you are well taken care of before I leave you.”

“I can make it home.”

“Then this should be quick.”

“Hannibal, I’m fine.”

“I believe this is something friends would do Will.”

That had shut him up. Hannibal wanted to be his friend. For reasons Will couldn’t understand. But the doctor was insistent on it. And there was no point denying that he liked the idea of friendship. Even if it made him nervous.

So, he let Hannibal follow him around the corner and up the stairs. He could feel the doctor’s curious gaze as it took in the short walk.

Will’s fingers shook as he took out his keys and unlocked the door. Only Bev had been in his place. They occasionally got together for a night of pizza and beer. Or whiskey. She also came over when he needed to bathe the dogs. That always ended up being controlled chaos since there were so many. It usually resulted in two running around the apartment soaking wet, two refusing to get in the tub altogether, and Winston just refusing to leave the tub. He liked to chase the bubbles, which resulted in a complete other mess. It’s why Bev volunteered to help if she could.

Will was acutely aware of the difference in his place in comparison to Hannibal’s. He was a doctor. He worked on the upper end. He was going to have a nice place. Or at least a place that had more rooms than two. And it wouldn’t be covered in dog hair. And he was sure the wallpaper wouldn’t be peeling. Or that water wouldn’t drip from the ceiling when it got to raining too hard or too long.

Pushing the door open, his dogs rushed at him, barking madly. Wanting to say welcome home and hello to the stranger. A short, sharp whistle had them settling into a sit at once. Except for Buster who took his time following the command.

Winston, who’d been sleeping on his bed, limped over to check on his human.

Moving inside, Will let Hannibal shut the door and chose to kneel in front of Winston. It gave him an excuse not to look at the doctor’s expression when he saw the place. It also kept him from looking around his home and noticing everything that needed to be cleaned before inviting guests over. Like the piles of fur that seemed to line the room regardless of how many times he swept and vacuumed.

Will remained in front of Winston till the cabinets in his kitchen started squeaking open. A glance to the side revealed Hannibal exploring what little cookware Will had. Though Will labeled it snooping since all the doctor had said he wanted to do was see Will home safely. Hannibal frowned as he opened cabinets to find few cooking utensils. Will wasn’t an experimental cook. He didn’t have the time, energy, money, or interest in it. This meant he tended to make the same five things.

Unfortunately, it also showed how little food there was too. Will fought not to go pink as Hannibal opened his fridge to reveal its empty contents. He could imagine how it must look to the doctor. He’d already accused him of not taking care of himself, and the lack of food in the house wasn’t helping.

Hannibal looked over to Will, who had stood by this point. He couldn't stay kneeling with the amount of nerves running through him.

He ran his hands over his pants, staring at Hannibal's tie. "Satisfied? I'm home, safe and sound."

Hannibal pursed his lips, twisting back to survey the kitchen again. Will didn't like that look. The doctor was up to something and Will wasn't going to like it. "I do not believe I will be until I ensure you eat." That sounded ominous. His next words confirmed Will's growing suspicion. "Having seen the state of your kitchen, I'd like to cook you a meal before I leave."

More like the state of my house , Will thought but didn't say. There was no doubt that Hannibal found his entire home unsatisfactory on most levels. Even to Will, it wasn't ideal. He didn't even like it most days. But it was home. He'd spent many years here with his dad before he died. He had some good memories in these four walls.

And it was what he could afford.

Sighing, Will didn't have the energy to get into a third argument today. Especially with the track record. He'd lost both the previous ones. It was almost a guarantee that he was going to lose this one. Hannibal was just too damn stubborn to listen to anything he had to say on the matter of his own health.

"And what do you plan on cooking? I don't have much. It's been a while since I've had time to go shopping." He wasn't lying. Between his two jobs, he usually had to choose between shopping or sleeping when it came to how he should spend his time. Sleep won most of the time. That or taking the dogs out to the park so they could burn some energy. He felt guilty for having them stuck in this small place for the majority of the time.

Hannibal's lips twitched, though Will wasn't sure if it was in disdain or amusement. "So I saw, but not to worry."

It was definitely amusement on his face. Will's eyes narrowed. "There aren't any nice stores in this area. You'll have to drive a ways to get groceries," he said, poking. He wanted to know what the doctor was planning to have that expression.

"Then I suppose it is a good thing I bought them before coming to see you."

Will just stared at Hannibal, meeting his gaze in shock. He'd never planned on leaving after seeing Will home. That'd been an excuse to get inside his home.

"I picked them up for dinner tonight," said Hannibal, clearly seeing the mistrust growing in Will's gaze. "But, I see no trouble cooking here. You need to eat to help you recover and I'd like you to start taking better care of yourself. And it would give us time to get to know each other better."

Will narrowed his eyes at the doctor. It felt like a trap. But it was hard to see with the expressionless look Hannibal tended to have.

His dogs looked back and forth between them. Winston pressed against his leg, eyeing the guest.

Rubbing Winston's ears, Will looked away first. He didn't want to say yes, but he didn't want to send the doctor away just yet either. Nerves skittered up and down his spine, his stomach knotting in on itself. The idea of trusting anyone like Hannibal again made him want to throw up, but Hannibal was in a league all his own.

Sensing Will's dilemma, Hannibal took a few steps closer, hands spread wide in front of him. "How about we treat this as a trial. If you end up liking the company, you'll agree to be my friend. If you don't, I won't bother you further William." He kept his voice soft, head ducked a little to try and catch Will's eye.

Will twitched at his name. "Why do you call me that?"

Hannibal blinked once, watching as Will lifted his foot to scuff the floor. "William? It is your name. Is there a reason I shouldn't?"

"No one calls me that."

"Do you dislike your name?"

Will looked up, bemused by Hannibal's question. His lips lifted into a small and crooked smile. "Your profession is showing, doctor."

Hannibal suppressed a grin, nodding in acknowledgment. He enjoyed the amusement on the tattooist's face. He did want to see what a full smile looked like on Will's face. That desire was new, but Hannibal found he didn't mind it. He said apologetically, "I'm afraid it is an occupational hazard. Though, in your case, it is because I wish to know you better, not because it is my job."

Will's brows quirked. Hannibal had too many layers. He doubted, regardless of how long they spent with each other, he would ever truly understand him. Even with the help of his gift. It was a challenge. One he couldn't resist attempting.

"Fine," Will said, pulling on one of his earrings as he looked around his home. "I'll take you up on your offer. But if you make me help, I will ruin it by accident. I'm no chef."

"Duly noted."

———

Will had absolutely no idea what Hannibal was cooking, but it smelled delicious. Garlic and other spices. Meat and vegetables sizzled in the pan. A pot sat behind it with noodles being cooked. He didn't recognize many of the spices that were being thrown in.

He sat at his table, facing the kitchen so he could watch Hannibal. Even with the kitchen being foreign, Hannibal moved like he'd grown up using it.

After returning with the groceries, Hannibal had removed his coat and vest, handed them to Will to put up, and rolled up his shirt sleeves. He'd refused when Will had offered to help. It

was probably for the best though, since Will's wrist was throbbing as bad as it was. Hannibal then started to work, sometimes humming softly to himself. Even Will could admit that he cut a very fine figure.

Looking at the ingredients set on the counter and the cooking utensils that had also been brought up from the car, Will said, "You meant for this to happen."

Hannibal paused his stirring to look back at Will.

Seeing his confusion, Will continued, "You always planned to cook me dinner. You never meant to just drop me off after making sure I got home safe."

"Why do you say that?"

Hannibal didn't refute his words. Instead he wanted to know what brought him to that conclusion.

Leaning his head on his good hand, Will watched as Hannibal went back to cooking. The doctor swayed back and forth as his attention shifted to different dishes. Winston was laid across Will's feet, but his others had gone back to lay on their beds. "For one, you brought your own utensils. But you are also using already opened spices. Which means they're from your own cabinet. You would have done that only if you planned to cook for me and wanted to prepare for any scenario so you wouldn't have to go back out once you were here."

"What if I told you I had plans to cook at a colleagues house tonight, but then I received the phone call from Ms. Katz?"

But Will was already shaking his head before Hannibal had finished. "You brought food you would have wanted to keep refrigerated for as long as possible. That means you would only pick them up after you left work, which also would have been also after Bev called you.You would have known you'd be seeing me, so there was no point in picking up the food unless you planned to cook for me."

Hannibal hummed, murmuring, "Clever boy." It was too soft for Will to hear. Then he said louder, "That is all true."

"You lied when you said you just wanted to make sure I made it home alright."

"Not at all, William. I said I wanted to make sure you were well taken care of," Hannibal said smoothly, not bothering to look back at him. He was back to throwing in spices to the pan of vegetables and meat. A flash of flame and an increase in sizzling, before his deft hands settled it all back in the pan again. "Making sure you eat a proper meal is part of that."

Will eyed Hannibal's back, running back through his own memory. It was true. Hannibal had never explicitly said he'd leave after seeing him home. Will had just assumed he would since it was ridiculous to think that the doctor would want to cook for him. He'd been sure that he'd have his own chef. But judging by how easily and quickly Hannibal moved about, it was clear the doctor cooked often and well, if the smell was anything to go off of.

Will was lost in thought, but he was pulled out when Hannibal said, “I’d been hoping to cook for you in my own home next Friday, but I went ahead and assumed you would not be up for that. And you need to eat, so this worked out just as well. No?” Hannibal turned to look at Will, pulling two bowls from the cabinet without looking.

“Because you want us to be friends.”

“As you do.”

“And why do you think that?” asked Will as he warily watched Hannibal approach. He set one of the bowls in front of Will. It looked as good as it smelled. The pale noodles seemed to sit in stark contrast with the dark meat and cooked vegetables. The closest Will got to this was spaghetti.

“This is Uni, a Japanese dish. As the name implies, as *uni* means sea urchin, it would usually contain it. Usually, I would serve a champagne with this, pairing off with the notable combination of sweet and salty. However, alcohol consumption is not allowed when taking pain medication,” Hannibal said as he returned to the kitchen to grab them both a glass of water.

Will looked at the dark meat, brows pulling together. He picked up a fork, feeling the odd weight in his left hand, to turn the contents over in his bowl. “I’ve never eaten urchin, but that doesn’t look like what I’d imagine it to be.”

“Quite right. It is traditionally served with sea urchin, but I did not find any of good quality, so I substituted."

"So, it's not uni then. If it doesn't have any?"

A small smile. "Perhaps not, but that is the dish it is modeled after. While it will not taste the same, it will no doubt still be delicious.” The chair creaked as Hannibal took his seat.

Will winced. He reached up to tug on his earring as he waited for Hannibal to settle. Even though it was funny when it did it under Bev, it was more mortifying in Hannibal’s presence.

Trying to ignore the heat under his collar, Will stabbed at the food and took a bite. Even though it wasn’t something he would typically eat, growing up poor, he learned to never say no to food and not to be picky. Sometimes all you got wasn’t something appetizing.

Flavors exploded in his mouth. He couldn’t help the small groan slip out of him, though it was more of a huff than anything else. He’d never tasted anything like it. Not in a long time anyways. Maybe before he moved to the city. Certainly not after. His mother stopped cooking after they came to Baltimore. He shoveled another bite of it, wanting to experience the burst of flavor again.

And then he remembered he wasn’t eating alone. He froze, eyes darting up to find Hannibal leaned back in his chair, hands folded in his lap as he watched. Feline satisfaction sat on

Hannibal's features. He wore pride much like a large cat did. With elegance and practice. It just felt more obvious with it being directed at Will.

Sensing that Will wasn't going to eat anymore while he watched, Hannibal picked up his own fork and started on his own meal. There was always some satisfaction in watching the rude finally reach their destined place, as nourishment for the actual deserving, but this was different. William was certainly causing an array of different emotions in him that he was not accustomed to, but he was curious in what ways they would finally manifest.

They ate in silence for a bit, neither feeling pressured to break it. Will's dogs watched, but knew they were not allowed to approach the table while Will was eating. Finally, as Will reached the bottom of his bowl, he asked, "Pork?"

The meat had some similarities, but it just didn't feel quite right. Then again, knowing Hannibal, it could be anything. He seemed wealthy enough to be able to procure any meat he wanted.

Hannibal gave him a small smile. "Of a variety. My butcher assures me that he only sells me the best."

Will hummed, finishing off his bowl and glass of water. He reached down to rub at his wrist, looking around his home. The ravenstag was back. He stood in the bathroom doorway, snorting and shaking his head. It was blurry around the edges. His wrist felt better as they ate, and now the pain was almost gone. And paired with a full stomach, Will could feel sleep tugging at him. He hid his yawn by standing to take his bowl back to the kitchen to wash it. A small apartment meant no dishwasher.

Now he wondered how he could politely ask Hannibal to leave. Up to this point, every attempt to get the man out of his life had been thwarted. "I thought you wanted to use this time to get to know me better," Will finally asked, pulling out the Dawn.

"I do, but I also know that you are tired. I figured this would not be the last time we could get to know one another. Unless you found our time together to be unbearable?"

Will could hear the humor curling around the last question. They both knew he hadn't. The silence had been comfortable and Will had been able to relax. A conversation would have only made Will uncomfortable at this point. The doctor seemed to have sensed that.

"And regarding your question earlier," Hannibal began, startling Will as he slid up next to him to put his bowl in the sink next to Will's.

Will hadn't heard him stand, let alone move towards him. There was no way a man of his size should be able to move that quietly. Especially in an apartment that was over sixty years old. Almost every step meant the floor would creak.

"What question?" Will asked, starting to heat the water. Another yawn worked its way out. He ran a hand over his eyes, trying to wipe away the exhaustion. Maybe he'd actually be able to sleep tonight. If the stag didn't chase him out of it.

Hannibal nudged Will till they switched places and Hannibal was in front of the sink. Will wasn't sure how he found himself drying the dishes Hannibal passed to him. He'd been planning to do all the clean up since he hadn't helped cook. "How I know that you want to be my friend."

Will had almost forgotten about it. He'd gotten distracted with the food and then with sleep.

"Oh."

"I think it is fairly simple," Hannibal said, waiting till Will looked up from drying the dishes. When Will finally did look at him, Hannibal tilted his head toward the bathroom door. "After all, you still have that, despite its poor state . "

Looking past him, Will suddenly realized what Hannibal was getting at. Mortification worse than earlier washed over him, turning his ears brilliant pink.

The coat that Hannibal had gifted to him still hung there, with the missing button and dirt covered sleeves. He'd told himself he'd put it in the coat closet, but then forgotten. And since no one comes to his home, there'd be no rush to make a decision on what to do with it.

But now Hannibal had seen it.

"Oh, fuck."

The explicit slipped out, Will too dazed to even realize it. Instead, he stood frozen, unsure what to do next. He couldn't hide it. Hannibal had already seen it. But he didn't want to leave it for the world to see either.

"The fact you didn't throw it away, even now that it is unwearable, tells me—"

"That I forgot to do so."

"That you care, even if it is only a small amount, about me—"

"Or that I'm poor and can't afford to be picky."

"If you did not like me, you would have tossed it the moment you walked through the door. But you hung it up, trying to preserve what is left of it." Hannibal paused to look the coat up and down. A small frown pulled at his lips, though Will couldn't be sure what it was directed at. "A rather futile effort if I believe. I am afraid it seems to be ruined beyond saving."

Will's ears went from pink to red at his words.

Unable to take it any longer, Will moved around Hannibal and threw the bathroom door open so that it hid the coat from view. While the damage was done, it didn't mean that he had to keep looking at it either.

Rubbing the back of his neck, Will didn't know where to look now. He certainly didn't want to look at Hannibal, but he felt ridiculous keeping his back to the doctor. The sound of clinking filled the room as Hannibal resumed cleaning the dishes.

Not knowing what else to do, Will moved back to his table, taking a seat again. He was too tired to keep standing, but it felt rude to lay on his bed while Hannibal was still here. His compromise was to lay his head on the table and just wait for Hannibal to finish before asking him to leave.

The sound of running water was soothing, and Will found himself drifting off as he waited.

It was odd. He normally couldn't fall asleep this easily. Especially with a stranger in his home. Regardless of how tired his body might be, he shouldn't be this close to sleep. His thoughts turned, slowly and unwilling to work, but piecing it together regardless.

"Will?"

Hannibal's voice sounded distant, as did the footsteps that approached. A hand landed on his shoulder and another ran through his hair.

Will's eyes refused to open, but he was able to get out, "Bastard." It was hardly a huff of air, his lips barely moving. "You drugged me."

The words were slurred, almost indistinguishable, being smashed against the table. But laughter sounded above him telling him Hannibal had understood regardless. "Just some pain medication. You need to rest and I had a feeling you would not allow that if I left you to your own devices."

The curse caught in Will's throat, his body refusing to listen to him any longer. He couldn't do anything as the doctor continued to run his fingers through his hair, brushing softly through the wild curls and lightly over his neck. It was soothing, allowing for Will's muscles to gradually relax, even with the awkward position. It lulled Will to sleep faster, despite his objections. The stag stood on his other side, its muzzle against his ear. A rhythmic whooshing of its breathing filled his head.

Oblivion took him as he felt Hannibal's hands gently lift him from the chair.

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

Whew. Hannibal's up to his old tricks again.

And please, if you noticed any issues let me know. It wasn't easy getting through this chapter since I haven't written in a while.

Alkis

Chapter Summary

Hannibal has business to take care of. So he took care of it.

Chapter Notes

I might have had a little too fun with Hannibal's POV. So I had to stop myself before it got out of hand haha.

TW: blood, torture, you know the usual

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The drive back to his office was quiet.

After Hannibal put Will to bed, he looked around the apartment. Not surprising, the tattooist had no clothes of any quality. After seeing what he'd worn in their previous meetings, Hannibal hadn't been expecting much. He found an old tuxedo that clearly had belonged to someone else tucked away in the back of the coat closet. He assumed it had belonged to William's father.

He'd also noted a lack of personal touch to the place. Only a few photos sat on the dresser, and many had been of his dogs. Only one was a family picture of when Will was a child. It was clearly taken somewhere else, based on the woods that the trio stood in. Will clearly favored his father, with the same dark and curly hair. His mother stood a little apart from the two. Her lips were turned up in a smile, but unlike the other two, her eyes were solemn. It was clear that while she was a part of the family, she wasn't attached. She'd probably left early in Will's life.

It would certainly explain some of the man's trust issues. He rarely had to work so hard to get someone to do what he wanted, but Will was proving to be anything but ordinary.

Resisting the urge to pick up the frame so he could get a closer look at young Will, he moved on to the bathroom. It was just as lackluster as the kitchen. The kitchen had been more than subpar. It had been something straight from a nightmare. Hannibal had never imagined that he'd end up cooking in such a place, but some sacrifices had to be made in order to achieve goals. This felt like a small one if things panned out how he wanted.

Despite the rather deplorable state of the bathroom, it was kept clean and tidy much like the rest of the home. And there, sitting on the sink, was the bottle that plagued Hannibal's nose every time he met with Will. The aftershave bottle that drowned out Will's natural scent rather than complimented it. Picking it up, Hannibal observed the ship on the front, rotating it in his hands. He wondered what caused Will to choose this one of all reasons.

Setting it gently back, after a short debate on whether to just remove it, he left the bathroom. Closing the door, the coat swung gently back and forth from the motion. Despite its state, it was hung up, in a place that could be seen from any place in the room. It wasn't shoved in a drawer or closet. It was high enough that none of the dogs could get to it.

Tilting his head, Hannibal ran his fingers over it, right over where the button was missing. Some dirt fell from it. It hadn't been shook out or washed. Will didn't know what to do with his gift.

Smiling slightly, he took it off the hanger and draped it over his arm. While tormenting Will had its merits, this wouldn't be because of him. He'd be tormented because of what someone else did to it, rather than what the gift meant to him. Will shouldn't waste his thoughts on lower beings. It was better to simply replace it with another.

Now it hung in the back of his car, the street lights catching it occasionally.

Driving downtown, music thumped out of the bars and clubs that lined the main street. Young people milled about, laughing and talking loudly. It was one of the few places where all classes ran into each other. The elite and poor both looking for an escape from their lives. The rich didn't want their responsibilities or the weight that came with money, and the poor didn't want to think of their consistent hellish days that seemed to have no end.

Stopping at a red, Hannibal watched as a group of four men catcalled two women on the other side of the street. Fingers tapping on the steering wheel, he observed as one of the men wolf whistled, getting the girls to turn to them. Both women were varying shades of blond, both a little taller than average. One had wild curls and the other pixie cut. Their muscle tone suggested sports, but they could also just enjoy working out. They both were eating sandwiches picked up from a street vendor. The men were of around the same age, but varied in physique and looks.

The man who'd wolf whistled, lean and rather forgettable overall, pointed to them and then made a crude gesture, thrusting his hips forward and grinding. Distaste curled in Hannibal's gut at the display, but watched with mild interest as the curly haired female, pushed her friend behind her, reared back, and threw something across the street.

Softball. The pair absolutely played softball.

The object shot straight as an arrow and struck the wolf whistler right below the eye. White condiment exploded everywhere, spraying all four of the men and the wall behind them. It could have been ranch or mayo. It was hard to tell in this light. The men cussed and spat, trying to wipe what they could off. Glancing back across the street proved that the girls had darted into a nearby bar before the men recovered.

“ *Bitch,”* the whistler screamed, holding one side of his face, glaring in the direction they disappeared in.

The light changed. The young man’s face lingered in the back of Hannibal’s mind even after he’d arrived at his office and taken a seat behind his oak desk.

This was not his psychiatrist's office. This was the one that was located under his club *Alkis,* the one he used for his other job . He could vaguely hear the music humming above him, the bass vibrating the walls. He knew by this point in the night, people would be well inebriated and loose with their cash. The high rollers would have already gone upstairs to start the card games. He would need to go overlook them soon, but there were other matters that needed to be handled before that.

Barney was already there when he arrived, taking the coat when Hannibal passed. “Have it cleaned and then returned to me, Mr. Matthews.”

“Should I replace the button sir?”

“No. Don’t worry about it. I will handle it.”

“Yes sir,” Mr. Matthew said before he walked out the door to put it away.

Leaning over, he pressed the intercom button that led to the office on the main floor and spoke softly, “Mrs. Wallace, please tell Mr. Delly to see our guest in.”

“Of course, sir,” came a voice just as soft.

Mrs. Wallace was a woman well into her seventies and who had been married five times. Small and spry, she had been a very beautiful woman in her younger days. Even now, elegance still clung to her fine bones. Cunning and charming, she had no trouble finding new, wealthy husbands easy. It also meant when she divorced them, she managed to make off with most of their wealth. Now she was one of the wealthiest people in Baltimore, though it was impossible to tell by looking at her now.

She had been Hannibal’s patient for a while, but a rather interesting encounter led him to believe she would be of better use in a different position.

Hannibal folded his hands across his lap, crossing an ankle over his knee, as he waited. He would need to go to one of his favored shops soon to pick out another coat for Will. Maybe something a little lighter so he could wear it more often. Or a nice suit for when Hannibal finally took him out. The tuxedo that he hid in the back of his closet would hang off him. It would do nothing to accent his beautifully built frame.

Sighing through the nose, Hannibal closed his eyes to recreate Will’s face when he’d first realized the coat had been meant for him. Shock and disbelief had shone in those eyes, turning them from an ocean of varying blues to pale blue. His lips had parted a little, his hand reaching up to play with those earrings. Hannibal had noted that Will had a habit of messing with them if he was feeling unsure about something. Even though he didn’t have any himself, he found he liked the piercings on Will.

Will's face shifted to when he actually took the coat. Hannibal had briefly wondered if he wouldn't be able to get him to take it, but it just took a little more coaxing to get him to take it. Those ever changing eyes shifted once the coat was in his hands. From pale blue to something deeper and darker. More thoughtful in nature and full of innocent wonder. It was as if his eyes wanted to match the tone of the coat. His lips had pressed together, like he was suppressing something. His fingers had run along the material, like they could memorize it through touch alone.

It was easy to admit that he liked how Will wore admiration. It lifted some years from his face. That already attractive face became something akin to a statue carved by Michelangelo. Breathtaking. Will didn't see himself that way Hannibal knew. The way he moved, with his head down and shoulders curved inward, spoke of hiding. A loss. One that Hannibal hoped to be able to correct eventually. Like the aftershave.

A sharp knock on his door, brought Hannibal out of his mind palace, back to his office.

"Enter, please."

Mr. Delly walked in, a bound and gagged man tucked under one of his arms.

Standing close to seven feet and over three hundred pounds, not much got in his way. He was useful to keep around. He also kept fights from happening in his club for the most part. Just by standing in the room was enough to deter most.

He set the man down on his knees in front of the desk, moving back to stand by the door. The man was middle aged, give or take, well out of shape, and seemed to be the stereotypical appearance of what one would imagine a taxi driver to look like. Only he wasn't a taxi driver. Mr. Kevin Edwards was who Ms. Lounds last had contact with before she disappeared in Maestro's district. He'd been the one to be the inbetween for her and whoever she was informing of Will's actions.

He was a rat really. But one who knew of Ms. Lounds last location.

Wide eyed, sweating but in one piece, Mr. Edwards' eyes darted around the office. It wasn't where he was expecting to end up. Purple so deep it was almost black colored the walls in crushed velvet. An armchair of angel white sat adjacent to the desk, facing it. Soft, warm lights were embedded into the ceiling. Some sat right above a light oak desk, massive and intimidating with carvings etched into the sides and legs. The floor was calacatta oro marble. A single red and white painting hung behind the man at the desk.

Mr. Edwards couldn't help but think it looked a little like blood splatter.

Another knock at the door had Mr. Edwards twisting with as much as his bound limbs would allow.

Barney stepped in, quietly shutting the door behind him. A manilla folder was tucked under his arm. He moved to stand behind Hannibal, eyeing Mr. Edwards with a blank expression. Swallowing hard, Mr. Edwards looked between them, trying to decide how badly he was screwed.

Hannibal sat back in his chair, surveying the man before him.

“Mr. Kevin Edwards,” he started, earning the man’s attention. He spoke slowly, his accent coloring the words just barely. “Do you know why you are here?”

Mr. Delly stepped up to remove the gag from his mouth before going back to his station. Sweat dripped off the end of his nose as Mr. Edward tried to swallow. “B-bad appliances?” he croaked out, licking his dry lips. He had a number of businesses going on that could admittedly land him in a situation like this. But something told him that this was something more serious.

The music coming above had him trying a different answer when the man in front of him remained stone cold and unmoved. “Or may-maybe a bad batch? I try to teach the boys how to appraise the drugs before they give it to the clubs, but you know,” he said, his words coming out more quickly now, his shoulders moving like he was trying to shrug, “kids never know how to do anything correctly. Usually takes a firm hand before they get it, yeah?” The man behind the desk looked like he was a club owner to Mr. Edwards. A little more ritzy though. The club owners he usually ran with were pretty low on the food chain. This one looked like he ate the ones he ran with for breakfast.

When Hannibal remained silent, Mr. Edwards laughed nervously. “Look, if you got a bad one, I’ll give you the next set for free, yeah? No biggie. We’ll just forget this ever happened and I’ll personally inspect the drugs the next time so that this doesn’t happen again. Deal, yeah?”

Barney shifted by Hannibal, folding his hands in front of him, but saying nothing.

Hannibal finally took pity on the sweating man and said, “Ms. Freddie Lounds.”

Mr. Edwards froze, eyes going wide at the name Recognition and fear flashed there before a quivering smile replaced it. His color was beginning to take a sickly pale hue. “Who? ‘Fraid so many broads go my way I can’t keep track of all of them.”

Hannibal slowly got to his feet, rebuttoning his jacket, as Barney held out the file. Hannibal took it and threw it at the man so the contents slid across the marble to his knees. Bank records with numbers highlighter, printed emails, and photos of Mr. Edwards and a woman who wore a ball cap. But the cap couldn't hide all the red curls.

“While I am sure that your memory is nothing to brag about, I am sure that even you would remember the woman who wired four thousand dollars to your account for doing a job for her,” Hannibal said, moving to stand in front of the desk. “Not to mention, a woman whose name is now infamous among mafia groups.”

Mr. Edwards gaped at the content around him and then at Hannibal, his brain finally making the connections. He choked, voice going high as he wheezed out, “You-You're the Cheseapeke Ripper.”

Hannibal gave him a smile that was more a baring of teeth. “And you are a foolish swine who did not heed the warnings given.”

Mr. Edwards blubbered, his face going from white to green. He was hyperventilating, almost choking on his own tongue. “W-wait. Wait. We can work something out, yeah? Like, if I help you, you’ll help me?”

Hannibal looked down at the man who was almost frothing at the mouth in desperation. He cocked his head to the side, folding his hands behind his back as he waited. In cases like these, it took very little effort to get what he wanted. But, that was not the issue here.

Looking up, Hannibal nodded to Mr. Delly, who stepped forward and cut the ropes that tied Mr. Edwards’ feet and hands together. Mr. Edwards rubbed his wrists, but didn’t stand and never looked away from Hannibal. He knew the leader when he saw one. The other two were just trained dogs. They wouldn’t do anything without his say so.

“What do you want to know?” Mr. Edwards asked, leaning so far forward his face was only inches from the ground, hands outstretched in front of him a little. It was almost as though Hannibal was a god and he a devout worshiper. “You wanna know where she is, yeah?”

“And how to contact her, yes,” Hannibal said, his voice velvet soft. He was smiling lightly down at the swine at his feet, eyes alight with mirth. Blood and sinew colored his imagination.

Mr. Edwards wiped his face, trying to get the sweat out of his eyes. “Yeah, no yeah. No problem sir. Not a problem. She’s been staying at the underground hotel, Dex. It’s mainly for immigrants or criminals on the run, but they’ll take in anyone. I mean anyone. No names, or anything. Just some cash and you’re in, yeah? I don’t know what room though,” he went on, eyes darting around the room. “Never met her there. Always in alleyways and things like that.”

For when you squealed , Hannibal thought. Ms. Lounds no doubt knew that he would find whoever she used as a runner, so she limited the ways he would be able to track him back to her. It was smart on her part. But, if she were really smart she never would have used a man like Mr. Kevin Edwards. They always dug for information in case situations like these were to happen.

“And you contacted her only through emails?” Hannibal prompted.

Mr. Edwards nodded, and then shook his head. Sweat fell from his chin to the marble floor. He reeked of cheap cologne and fear. “Sort of. She was constantly making new accounts and deleting the old ones, so she always got into contact with me. She called me once. The number is in my phone history, but I just assumed it was a burner, yeah?”

Hannibal hummed, watching Mr. Edwards’ hands creep closer to his shoes. He looked to Mr. Delly. “I have it sir. It’s with the rest of his possessions we confiscated.”

“See?” Mr. Edwards said, almost screeching by this point as he felt his freedom near. “You can have it. I don’t need it. So, you can just let me go, yeah? I helped you, right?”

Hannibal looked back to the swine. His eyes were practically bulging out, sweat running down his face in rivets. His once white shirt was soaked in sweat, yellow rings around the

neck and arms speaking to this happening repeatedly. Grease clung to his hair and he had a semi-beard coming in. One hand now rested on one of Hannibal's shoes. While he was once a rat, it was clear a swine fit him more appropriately.

Smiling kindly down at him, Hannibal withdrew the scalpel he kept up his sleeve out and said, "I am afraid I cannot do that."

Screeching filled the room and blood pooled onto the floor as Hannabil swung down and jammed his scalpel through the offending hand. The rich red was enchanting against the white and gold marble. He twisted the blade, feeling the bone grind against it. Mr. Edwards' other hand came up and grabbed Hannibal's wrist to try and stop him, but it ended with the blade being ripped from one hand and stabbed into the other.

Blood sprayed out, barely missing the white chair thankfully, before it dripped to the floor. Hannibal was rather fond of that chair. He'd hate to remove it because of something like this swine.

Leaving the scalpel pierced through the palm of Mr. Edwards, Hannibal rose fluidly from the floor and stepped around him. He paused at the door to straighten his jacket, turning back to the man who stared up in horror. Hannibal gave him another smile. "I never made you a deal, and as the Chesapeake Ripper, I must keep my word. I promised that anyone who helps Ms. Lounds would be my enemy. Well all know what happens to those who become the enemy of the Ripper Mafia. Have a good day, Mr. Edwards. I doubt we will meet again."

Mr. Delly opened the door and Hannibal slipped out, letting his guard shut it behind him.

The music was louder in the hallway, thumping against the soles of his feet. It covered any noise coming from his office. His men would drag him to a soundproof room later.

Hannibal glanced at his hands covered in blood. A little got on his cuff, but that could easily be removed. It would truly be a sight to see William bathed in blood. A hum of satisfaction left him at the image.

Only a little longer now.

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

> Fall is my favorite season, and Halloween one of my favorite holidays. And I am sooo ready for both. Which means monsters and myths have been on the brain. Thoughts on a blind!Will with a Medusa!Hannibal? Saw a beautiful artwork with a blind female and Medusa, and my brain went straight to Hannibal and Will. Naturally. But yes? No, absolutely not? Writer's choice?

Tit-for-Tat

Chapter Summary

Will needs answers, even if it means the end

Chapter Notes

Okay, so this chapter did not go in the direction I expected. It was supposed to end with an invite to dinner...but it didn't. You might notice that happens a lot to me. I figure it's because I very rarely have a plan. Thankfully, I like surprises (for the most part), and I would count this as a good one.

So buckle up, goodfellows. Emotions about to go off like cute, wee firecrackers.

Not beta read

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will removed his apron, shoving it in his locker, as he finished removing the rest of his uniform. Today's morning shift at *Royale* had been hellish. Jack had moved him to the back to wash dishes since his wrist was still wrapped. It would make it difficult for him to serve customers.

Like washing dishes one handed was easy.

He pulled on a hoodie, shoving his holstered gun in the back of his pants, before yanking out his backpack. Jack had only come in the back to yell at him for being slow. He'd yelled back if Jack was that unhappy he should just fire him. That had gotten him a grumble before Jack left to yell at the waiters.

The others yelled their goodbyes when they heard his locker slam shut. Will slipped out the back door, giving them a halfhearted wave. He took a deep breath as the door clicked shut behind him. Even though it was now late summer, the day was pleasantly cool for just past ten in the morning, a breeze running through the city. It was teasing them with fall.

Will let himself lean against the wall by the door, massaging his wrist. It still ached, even with him minimally using it, but it felt better than it had. Hannibal had left a note on the leftovers he'd put in Will's fridge not to remove the bandaging for at least thirty-six hours. And then, at the bottom of the note, there was a phone number.

Hannibal had left him his phone number.

Will had ignored the warm fuzzies that had bounced around his stomach for the rest of the day.

It had been almost four days since Hannibal had cooked for him. And drugged him. The damn man made sure to get his way, regardless of what it took. He'd obviously realized that Will had no intentions of taking the medication, so he ensured he did. It was sly and ridiculous. Will had quickly realized that these two adjectives were very much the definition of the doctor.

Now, well past the thirty-six hour mark, Will still hadn't removed the wrapping unless he took a shower. The first time, it had taken him over an hour to get it rewrapped. Bev had tried to help, since he decided to walk down to his shop to ask her. It had just made it worse. Finally, Molly stepped in and wrapped it in less than twenty seconds, unable to handle the ridiculousness of watching them any longer.

Apparently, Wally was prone to injuring himself.

Will stood looking at his wrist debating. He was caught up on paperwork, and he still couldn't tattoo anyone. Molly had proven that she could deftly handle any management situation that came up in the shop and Bev could handle any client issue.

Reaching back into the side pocket of his backpack, he pulled out the pain medication Hannibal had given him. He'd thrown it in his backpack days ago, but he hadn't taken any since Hannibal tricked him into taking them. The bottle rolled in his hand as he twisted it between his fingers, reading the label.

Hannibal was a puzzle Will couldn't figure out. By all accounts, the doctor shouldn't want anything to do with him. From their social standings to their mannerisms, they were vastly different. And yet, the doctor continuously returned. And while the reasons were logical, there were things he could have done if he wanted to. He could have mailed the coat to Will. He could have told Bev where to take him or what to do after his assault. He could have sent a care package or had food delivered to the shop.

Will ran his thumb over the lid. Sirens wailed in the distance, drowned out by Will's thoughts.

Hannibal wanted to be friends. And insisted that Will wanted to be friends. But Will wasn't sure if that's what he really wanted.

The reality was with his mental state and history with psychiatrists, he shouldn't want anything to do with Hannibal. He should be trying to put space between them, shoving the doctor away at every chance. But he'd spent his life pushing most away. His *cocktail of neurosis* , as it was once described to him, made it hard for people to get close. Or want to get close. Bev was an oddity. Really, everyone at *Wolf Trap* was.

Most psychiatrists would only want to get closer to Will to study him, not befriend him. Get to record his abnormalities and make a book on it. That had been the last one's reason, among

others, for getting near him. But Hannibal hadn't shown the same inclinations.

Hannibal wanted something else. Will could *see* it. And the man had said so himself several times now. Though friendship felt shallow for what it felt like Hannibal wanted.

Then again, Hannibal didn't know everything about Will. His interests might change if he did. Or he already knew, and was just toying with Will.

The thought cause Will's breath to seize.

The bottle of pain meds rattled as Will shoved it in his pocket. It was time he did something, rather than always waiting for the doctor to do something.

Will wasn't even sure if Hannibal would be in, though it being a weekday had him assuming he was. He also didn't know if he'd be with a patient. But he couldn't bring himself to turn around either. So he stood right outside Hannibal's office in the waiting room, pacing back and forth, the package sitting in his backpack feeling as though it weighed a ton. It had been a last minute decision to walk into the wine store he saw near Hannibal's office building, and then an impulse buy to get the red wine.

He told himself it was a thank you gift for everything Hannibal had done for him.

When he'd texted Bev, telling her he wouldn't be in, she wanted to know why. When he hadn't answered, she guessed. She guessed right. When she found out he was going to visit Hannibal at work, she went and found his work address, sending it to Will.

Good luck , she'd sent him, followed by a winky face. He didn't bother telling her it wasn't that kind of visit. She wouldn't believe him anyways.

The building his office was located in was just as fancy as Will had been expecting. It was in a building of old architecture, before sleek skyscrapers had become a thing. And there was a doorman who opened the door for Will. He hadn't said anything, but Will had felt his questioning gaze.

He'd ducked his head, heading straight for the elevator without looking at anyone.

The waiting room was as fancy as the rest of the place. Red carpet, pale walls, modern wall art, chairs that were probably less comfortable than they looked. A very traditional looking waiting room for a psychiatrist's office. Though, there was no receptionist, which he found odd. The last one he'd been in hadn't been this nice and there had been a receptionist, checking people in and keeping the doctor informed. Hannibal clearly wasn't hurting for clients, so it was a little strange he didn't have someone doing that.

Shaking his hands, Will glanced back to the door. He couldn't hear anything from the other side, but he wasn't surprised. Hannibal probably hadn't wanted anyone to be able to eavesdrop on another's appointment. But now Will didn't know if Hannibal would be with anyone else.

Huffing a sigh, he tugged at his earrings, staring the door down. He wouldn't get anywhere just standing here. He needed to either knock or leave. He could leave. Hannibal would have no idea that he'd even come by. He could then pretend that he hadn't hiked up and down the city looking for this building, almost getting hit with a cab at one point.

Finally, he took a fortifying breath and went to the door. He promised himself that if Hannibal didn't answer it within the first thirty seconds, he would just go. He was probably with a patient anyways. Lifting a hand, Will knocked lightly, taking a step back as he waited.

Looking up, he found that the ceiling had an intricate crown molding. He couldn't find it in himself to be surprised. The doctor had proven to be someone who paid attention to the details.

About the time Will was deciding he should just leave, the doorknob turned and he found himself looking at Hannibal.

They stared at each, both surprised by the other's presence. Will hadn't expected Hannibal to actually answer the door. He'd convinced himself by this point that Hannibal would be with someone.

"William," Hannibal said, blinking at the tattooist. He had wondered who had rudely come into his office without prior notice. He'd suspected it had been his patient Franklyn Froideveaux trying to catch him at lunch again. But instead he found one of the last people he would expect to turn up here.

A warm feeling uncoiled in his chest, seeping down to his toes. Hannibal gave him a small smile. "I wasn't expecting you. Please come in."

Will rubbed his neck, looking a bit sheepish as he stepped by him. "Sorry. I should have probably called before just showing up here. You could have been in the middle of a session."

"Not at all," Hannibal said easily, shutting the door behind him. Will smelled of dish soap and greasy food. He'd clearly just come from working at the diner. Hannibal suspected he had shown up in an impulse moment. Hannibal doubted he would have shown up otherwise. If a missing prior notice meant Will would come to him, he could let the lack of etiquette slide. "I was just sitting down for lunch. Would you care to join me?"

Will blinked as he took in the office. It had vaulted ceilings and two stories of books. A ladder led up to a walkway for the second story. Large leather armchairs sat to one side of the room, near large windows. Small bobbles sat around the room, speaking to Hannibal's taste and travels.

Turning, Will found Hannibal moving to his desk where his lunch was already set out. It looked even fancier than what he'd made for Will a few days ago.

Looking away, Will cleared his throat, shaking his head. "Uh, no. I, um, I didn't come here to poach your food." He forced a laugh, wondering what to do now.

Hannibal took a chair that sat against the wall behind his desk and put it adjacent to his own before taking a seat. “Please sit, Will. I’m sure you could use the nutrition and I have plenty to share. I always pack extra incase I end up having to work late.”

The delicious smell pulled Will forward, but he didn’t sit. He still couldn’t tell what was in the dishes, but when it smelled that good, he supposed it didn’t matter much.“So, I’m taking your dinner? I can grab something when I leave.” Though he wouldn’t. He didn’t have the budget for that right now.

Judging from the look Hannibal gave him, he knew that. Or at least had guessed that.

“Please,” Hannibal said again, gesturing to the chair Will was inching towards. His dark eyes were taking in Will’s appearance, noting the circles under his eyes and pale complexion. “I insist. I am afraid I am unwilling to let you leave hungry.”

“I’m not hungry right now.”

Will’s body answered before Hannibal could, his stomach giving a rumble, reminding him he hadn’t eaten breakfast. Usually he snagged something from the diner during small breaks between customers, but dishes had kept him too busy for that. Now his body was responding to the enticing offer Hannibal had given him.

A small smile tugged at Hannibal’s lips, growing wider as pink tinged Will’s neck and ears. “I do believe you have been overruled William.”

Trying to hang on to what dignity he had left, Will slid quietly into the seat. He set his bag by his feet, tucking his hands against his stomach. Like that would keep it from making any more noise. Hannibal paid him no mind as he pushed a container towards him, a fork propped on it.

Will glanced at him, staring at his tie. It was eggshell white, with a pocket handkerchief to match. His three piece suit was a pale blue, with an even lighter blue creating a faint pattern of plaid. Somehow, he’d expected another paisley tie, but Hannibal’s clothing choice was becoming less of a shock, regardless of his own thoughts on the clothes. By this point, it would be a bigger shock if Will saw him in anything other than a three piece.

Looking down, Will noted the stains that littered his dark hoodie and the missing string for the hood. There was also a hole near the hem from when Buster, his brown and white small dog who seemed to be able to do more damage than what his appearance suggests, got a hold of it. His jeans were old too, fraying around the ends.

Hannibal made no move to eat. Will realized that he had no intention of eating until Will did. Tentatively picking up the fork, he stabbed a piece of meat and popped it in his mouth. It was just as good as it smelled. And even better than the Uni. Will hadn’t thought that was possible.

At the delighted way Will ate, Hannibal felt the same emotion unfurl in him. It compounded with the already warm sensation he’d been feeling since Will turned up. He dug into his own container, letting silence stretch between them. He felt no rush to push Will. The fact that

he'd shown up here of his own volition spoke volumes to Will's feeling for him, regardless of what the tattooist admitted.

As Will ate, his bag weighed on his foot, reminding him of the bottle. But he wasn't sure how to get the conversation from ' *this food is deliciou* s' to ' *here's a bottle of wine I randomly picked up to thank you for everything you've done, and by the way what is it you really want Dr. Lecter because no one just wants to be my friend?'*

Tapping his fork against the meat, Will flipped it around. "What is this?" Will asked, his nerves finally getting the best of him. He couldn't handle the silence any longer. A quick glance over showed that Hannibal had already finished his portion and was putting it away.

"Steak and kidney pie. An acquaintance of mine gave me the kidney. He decided he couldn't use it anymore and didn't want it to go to waste," Hannibal said as slid his food containers into his desk. Sensing Will's gaze, he looked up, only to find Will looking down, head bowed low.

Hannibal's answer had Will blinking down at his food. He'd never eaten kidney before. It tasted better than he would have thought. "Huh. Why didn't he use it?"

"Had an unfortunate business emergency that took him out of town." Hannibal watched as Will finished the last of his food, removing the container to put that one away too. "The kidney was not going to keep till he returned, so he thought it best to pass it on."

"Well, it was very delicious."

"Thank you, Will," Hannibal said, pausing as he took in the way Will's shoulders were folded in, his hands reaching up to tug on his earrings. The man was clearly uncomfortable, and while Hannibal didn't mind it, he was in a bit of a time crunch. He was expecting another client in just under an hour. Leaning forward, he folded his hands on the desk, trying to get Will to look at him. "What brings you here?" Glancing down at his bandaged wrist, he asked, "If your wrist is still causing you problems, I believe it would be prudent for you to go to the hospital."

Will yanked his hands off the desk, tucking them out of sight as he looked to the side. "No. It's fine." He nudged his bag with his foot, taking a fortifying breath. He needed to have this conversation. He couldn't keep doing this if Hannibal was going to turn out to be just like everyone else. "Bev thought we should keep it wrapped up a little longer since she thinks I'm reckless."

"You do seem to have a tendency to do things others would perceive as reckless."

Will looked at him. "Others? Not you?"

"I believe there is more than one way to think of an action. Bravery can look like recklessness, and prudence can look like cowardness. I believe, while you have reckless moments, you are not thoughtless, which is often a key ingredient if you are to be truly reckless," Hannibal answered, eyes dark with thought, but tone light. Almost playful.

Will laughed, ducking his head. “I think Bev would disagree.”

“Ms. Katz does have a keen eye for calling things as they are.”

Will snorted. That was true. She called Will on his shit all the time. And for Zeller and Price’s bickering. The only person she didn’t was Molly. Will hadn’t decided if it was because she hadn’t been around all enough, or if Bev was as smitten with Molly as the rest of his clients and employees were.

Shifting his weight in the chair, his knee hit his bag again, pulling his attention back to the present. Clearing his throat, Will opened his bag and pulled the wine bottle out, setting it between them. “A thank you for everything you’ve done for me and my shop.”

“Montepulciano d’Abruzzo,” Hannibal hummed, lifting the bottle to examine. His pronunciation of the name was arresting. It was flawless, his tongue twisting to form the vowels perfectly. Will squinted at him, sure that he spoke Italian if he could speak that smoothly. “They make beautiful wines. It is very hard to find a bad bottle from them. A thoughtful and lovely gift William, though I am lost as to why you feel the need to thank me.”

Will looked away, down to the desk, as Hannibal’s gaze shifted from the bottle back to him. He pulled at his earrings, speaking to his lap as he said softly, “And I don’t know why you want to be my friend Hannibal. So, if you answer my question, I’ll answer yours.”

“A quid-pro-quo then.”

Will gave a jerky nod. “Tit-for-tat.”

There was a pause, one long enough Will was sure Hannibal was going to refuse or at least present an objection, but then Hannibal leaned back into his chair, setting the bottle back on the desk. His hands rested his lap, relaxed and open. “Very well. Please ask.”

Another breath, and then Will lifted his head, looking Hannibal dead in the eye. He wasn’t going to bury his head in the sand. “Why do you want to be my friend?”

Hannibal tilted his head, lips pursed. “I am afraid I cannot answer that question in full.”

Will’s muscles bunched, ready to simply get up and leave. He didn’t want to play mind games. He was tired of people trying to deceive him to get what they wanted from him.

Sensing Will’s intention, Hannibal continued smoothly, “I must confess that I do not know all the reasons I wish to be your friend. However, I do know that you intrigue me. You are unlike anyone I’ve ever met. Sometimes, I feel as though we are the same person. And others, it is more as though we are two sides of one coin.”

Truth. All truth, but not the whole truth. Will could see that. Steeling himself, he asked, the words coming out slow and stilted, “After you came and got Abigail, did you look me up?”

It didn’t make sense for Hannibal to, not with them talking for less than ten minutes, but Hannibal was sharp. He didn’t miss much. He would have picked up on Will’s oddities and

strong distaste for those of his profession. While he wouldn't be able to get almost anything from looking him up, there was one thing he'd be able to find without much effort. One article posted on him by Dr. Frederick Chilton. And it would explain why he kept trying to get close to him.

"Yes."

Short, direct, and unapologetic.

"So you knew about me - about my *unique cocktail of personality disorders and neuroses*- when you brought me that coat."

"I learned of your pure empathy before I brought you the coat, yes."

And that's all Will needed to know. Angry, and hurt, Will shot up from his seat, breaking eye contact, his words almost spitting out of him. "You wanted to win me over. You wanted to fucking study me, like that other damn pychairists. Haven't you people done enough damage? Why can't you just leave me alone?" He felt like he was breathing fire by the end, eyes darting around to look at anything by Hannibal.

It hurt to breathe.

Hannibal stood as well, his motions smooth and precise. He moved around the desk, ducking his head to try and get Will to look him in the eye again. "William, I know you may feel that way, but that is not what I wanted. I did not approach you with the intention of studying you."

"Bullshit," Will snarled, backing away, hands snatching up his backpack. He didn't think it would hurt this much to learn what he already knew. Apparently a small part of him had already been convinced that Hannibal was different. That this between them was different. That Hannibal wanted him, wanted to see him, because of him, not because of some professional gain it had.

And having that chance ripped away from Will so fast *fucking hurt* .

Hannibal knew what would happen if Will got out that door. Could see it in the agony that was rippling across Will's face, eyes the darkest blue-grey Hannibal had ever seen them. Hannibal knew that usually, if he pursued someone like Will when they wanted to leave, he would do more damage than good. It was why he had allowed Will to put the amount of distance he had up to this point. But he knew that if Will left before he could fix this, any connection they had built would shatter and the tattooist would never allow it to build again.

Coming to a decision, Hannibal shot forward, grabbing Will and hauling him into his arms. He held him, preventing the man from escaping even as Will struggled to shove him off.

"Will, please listen to me," Hannibal said, his voice low, lips pressed against Will's ear. "Look at me. See if I am lying." It was the closest Hannibal would allow himself to begging.

Will breathed hard, his face pressed against Hannibal's throat and his hands trapped between their bodies. He could feel Hannibal everywhere. One of his arms was wrapped around Will's

waist, anchoring them together, but the other hand ran up and down his back, brushing over the tight muscles. The hair on the back of his neck had stood up at the feel of Hannibal's lips against the shell of his ear, his breath warm.

Will knew he should refuse. Push him away and just leave. Pretend that none of this ever happened. But he didn't want to. And standing there, pressed as tightly as they were together, Will could feel Hannibal's heart beating. It hammered just as fast as his own. Despite how collected the man looked, he was as frantic as Will.

After a short pause, Will gave a nod.

Loosening his grip, Hannibal gave just enough so that Will could look up at him, but not pull away. Finally able to see those ever changing eyes again, Hannibal leaned forward till their foreheads pressed together, his free hand reaching up to tangle in Will's hair.

Will's own hands traveled up till they gripped the lapels of the suit jacket, pulling them even tighter.

Never looking away, Hannibal said softly, "I did look into you after we met. I found myself unable to get you out of my head. At odd times of the day, I would catch myself thinking of only you. You created this hunger in me to know more. So, yes, I did learn of your gift."

Hannibal sushed the scoff that slipped out of Will, tightening his grip in his hair.

"It is a gift. You can truly see people. Any person. You can understand them at a level few could ever hope to understand a single person. Yet the world does not see you. It cannot see you." It was a truth Will had known for a long time. The pain from it had faded, but now it was sharp in his chest. "But I do. And I want to," Hannibal said, his voice dropping even lower. Will's hands held onto Hannibal so tightly his knuckles were white, but he didn't look away. That ugly feeling in his chest had frozen. "I do not want to dissect you. I do not want to publish you. I want to be your friend," and lower still his voice dropped till it was barely a whisper, like his next words were precious gems meant only for Will, "and so much more."

Will looked at Hannibal, looked into Hannibal, trying to see the lie. But there wasn't. His emotions were stripped bare for Will to see. The aloof mask was gone and Will could see so much. Pain. Anger. Hope. Need. Hunger. And more.

Yanking his eyes down before he saw too much, Will swallowed hard, but didn't pull away. He tried to ignore the warmth that pooled in his gut. Hannibal waited for Will to answer, his gut tight with anticipation.

Finally Will looked up, his gaze settling on Hannibal's lips as he muttered, "The wine was a thank you for wrapping my hand up." A small pause broke his words before Will had enough courage to finish. "And for wanting to be my friend."

A puff of air hit Will's lips as Hannibal let out a deep sigh. It was as if he had this deep pain that he was finally able to let go of with Will's words. "Oh William. Believe me when I say that it is I who should thank you. You have no idea exactly how much you mean to me. All I want is to be there for you and help you achieve everything you desire."

They stayed holding each other for a long while after that.

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

Gonna be honest, if Hannibal grabbed me like that I think my heart would stop. From fear or excitement? No idea. It's fifty-fifty.

But, on an unrelated note, I did upload the start of a new fic. So, my goal is to rotate which one I update. That just means chapter updates for this one might take longer sometimes all. Sorry!

The Art of Avoidance

Chapter Summary

Will avoids a lot of things. Bev puts in her two-sense.

Chapter Notes

This chapter fought me so hard, which is why it took me a while to get it out. I kept writing things, and then deleting because I felt they were too heavy-handed or cliché. Ugh. But it's done! Onward.

Not beta read

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will had made a fucking art of avoiding Hannibal Lecter.

He didn't do anything extravagant to do it. He kept it simple by avoiding all the places Hannibal knew to look. He also didn't tell anyone at the shop where he was. Bev would betray him in a heartbeat. Molly would feel obligated to tell Hannibal where he was. Price and Zeller would tell him because they wouldn't think *not* to.

Sweat dripped down Will's forehead and back as he meandered through the park, heading for a bench under a large Sycamore, with the leashes swinging in his hands. Max and Winston trailed close behind him while the others tore through the open space, giddy from so much freedom. He'd been coming here for the last three days to let the dogs run.

After they had let go of each other in Hannibal's office, Will hadn't known what to do with himself. He went beet red, refusing to even look at Hannibal. Shame and regret chewed at his insides.There was no telling how Hannibal saw him after that.

He'd grabbed his stuff and ran out the door before he could see what Hannibal thought of him. He didn't even stop when Hannibal called after him, skipping the elevator and going straight for the stairwell. He took the stairs two at a time to put as much distance between them as he could. He was sure the only reason Hannibal hadn't chased him was because he had another patient coming.

Will sat sprawled on the bench, watching his dogs run through the grass. He told himself he wasn't really avoiding Hannibal. It wasn't as though they saw each other that often. And he deserved a break from the store, and the dogs needed to be let outside more often. Now since

he wasn't able to tattoo anyone and Jack had given him a few extra days off to heal, he could. Apparently, he made a bad enough dishwasher to have Jack telling him to rest without asking for it.

His pack was delighted by the sudden change of schedule. Max crawled under the bench, burying himself in dirt to snooze. Will would need to bathe him when they got back. Winston sat leaning against Will's knees, panting hard, as he watched the others run about. He was enjoying his new found freedom of no cone.

His leg had healed well, but it still needed to be watched. It was probably one of the reasons that Winston wasn't out in the middle of the playing too. It would continue to bother him for a while. The most Will could do was make sure he didn't do anything to make it worse.

The sun beat down, occasionally hiding behind clouds. The trees shook in the light breeze, their shadows dancing across the grass. Will reached over and patted Winston as his thoughts wandered around. He couldn't bring himself to think too long about what would happen the next time he saw Hannibal. Probably an awkward conversation about the weather or how their lives had been since the last time. The idea of it made him a little ill. He hated small talk. And more so because of what it would mean.

He could hear Hannibal denying it, in that soft, posh accent, that nothing had changed. Too polite to let his misgivings show blatantly. Then again, it would probably be more unnerving if Hannibal meant it about wanting to be his friend. He certainly seemed to.

Will could still feel his body heat sometimes. And his hand running up his back. The way he'd looked at him had been unlike any way he'd been looked at before. Like he could understand him.

Will snorted at the thought, tugging on his earrings. Few people understood him. Though Bev was the closest.

When he'd told her he was taking a few days off, she'd given him a weird look. "Why? I mean, great, go take care of yourself, but you don't take time off," she'd said looking pointily to his injured wrist. A reminder of how hard she had to fight for him to leave the office right after he'd been attacked.

Will ran an eye through the paperwork one more time, organizing them as he avoided looking at her. He might be the one with the empathy disorder, but she could often read him like an open book at the times he most didn't want to be read. "Because I need some time off."

"You don't have to tell me, but that hasn't stopped you from coming in before." She paused, eyes narrowing, before she asked, "Does this have anything to do with Dr. Lecter?"

"Why would you think that?" Will didn't stop going through the papers, finalizing the organization. With this, Molly was more than likely able to handle anything that came up while he was out. She was adept like that. He really couldn't thank Hannibal enough for sending her his way. She'd been a life saver in the last few days.

Bev leaned against his desk, tilting her head as she watched him pick up his bag from the floor. “Because he’s the only thing I can think of that would send you running like this.”

That earned her a glare.

She raised her hands innocently, hair swaying as she pushed off his desk, before she tucked them behind her back, looking him up and down. “Will.”

He hummed, rummaging through his bag. When Bev didn’t reply right away, he stopped to look up at her. She had the same look on her face when she was about to say something he found comforting and aggravating. She would tilt her head back and to the side, press her lips, with her brows coming together slightly. She had the same look when she informed him he did not make enough to have ten dogs. Or when she told him Alana wasn’t any good for him. Or when she drank the last bit of coffee and he was heading to get more.

“It’s okay to like someone. Or get close to them,” she said, taking a step towards him. He looked away, to his bag, where he zipped up his bag and slung it over his shoulder. “You’re allowed to have those things.”

Will nodded, though it was more out of acknowledgment to what she said than actual agreement. He didn’t want to get into this conversation with her. It was one that tended to crop up in the early hours of the morning after they’d polished off one of his bottles of whiskey. He didn’t like having it while they were drunk, he certainly didn’t like it now when he was sober.

Sensing his discomfort, Bev suddenly smiled, like something occurred to her. “Besides, you aren’t getting any younger. You should let someone rail you before you’re too old to enjoy it,” she said, almost chipper at the idea. Will’s ears went bright red as he choked. Bev doubled over in laughter, more than pleased with the reaction she got.

Clearing his throat, Will said, “Who said I’d be the one getting railed?”

While he was overall small in build, that didn’t mean he was small in personality. You had to be assertive to run a business, otherwise people would take advantage of you. His shop would have been run into the ground if he had let that happen.

Bev scoffed, crossing her arms. “I never said you couldn’t switch, if you really wanted to, I’m just saying that man is all alpha. He’s just got that energy. And, I bet he’s just dying to take you apart.”

Huffing a sigh, he glared at her, ignoring the knowing smirk. “We aren’t like that.”

“And who says you couldn’t be?”

“And I’m not that old,” Will added, ignoring her question.

“Ah,” Bev sighed, wiggling a finger at him as she clicks her tongue in disappointment, “but eventually you just can’t do it as often or spring back from it like you used to. Longer recovery time and all that. You should do it while you can do it *copiously* .”

“Christ Bev! Would you stop?”

“Besides, if you aren’t careful, it'll be all bottled up in you when I put your saggy ass in the old people’s home. You’ll be going at it so loud the nurses will be able to hear you. And you’ll probably break a hip trying to get it out of your system.” She paused, horror creeping over his features like the image of that suddenly hit her. “Lord. Imagine trying to explain *that* to the nurse on duty.”

For the life of him, he couldn’t understand why he was friends with her. “Are you serious?”

“When was the last time you had sex, by the way?”

Longer than he cared to think about. All one night stands. All when he was a teen, before his dad had passed. He’d found out early on that relationships didn’t tend to work out well for him. Or for whoever he was with. But since he took over the shop, he really didn’t have the time or energy to go out to look for a partner, no matter how brief it’d be.

“Why do you even want to know that?”

She grinned at him, flopping back into the guest chair. Crossing her legs, she folded her hands in her lap as she watched him inch towards the door. “So I can keep track of how long it’ll be before you combust with need. That way when you suddenly don’t show up for work, I’ll know why.”

“I’ll see you later Bev,” he said to her shoes, ignoring her laughter and her question, as he slipped out. She hadn’t tried to stop him, and Molly had just waved goodbye when he walked out. Price and Zeller were too busy arguing about whether a eastern dragon or western dragon was cooler to notice.

She’d texted him since then, more to check that he was actually still alive more than anything. And to nose a bit to see if he’d seen Hannibal.

Winston nudged Will’s hands, bringing his thoughts back to the present. Buster and Zoe wrestled, snapping and provoking each other to chase. A mother and child were across the park, flying a kite. The mother hovered over the boy, her hands never leaving him as he clung to the ktie rope. To the left of them, a man walked along the sidewalk, a small limp in his step, almost unnoticeable.

Will sighed. He knew he had to face Hannibal eventually.The man was too persistent to let things remain as they were.

Abigail crossed his mind. She had flitted through his mind on occasions, usually when he was preparing for bed. She’d looked so small wrapped up in his jacket. And been really light. He hoped she was doing well. Though knowing her father, she probably wasn’t. Not really. Even with Hannibal promising to keep an eye on her, there was only so much he could do for her when she had a father like that.

Someone obsessive, possessive, and bound to be problematic when she got old enough to leave. Not that Will could prove that. It was all just what he could see off of her. Her

reactions and state of being. A part of him said he should have never given her back. He knew what would happen if he did. Or at least, what would most likely happen. But he couldn't keep her either. No doubt Freddie would have made that impossible. And Abigail would have probably wanted to return to her father.

Rubbing his neck, Will sat back up, glancing around the park.

"Buster! Jack! Zoe!" Will yelled, suddenly realizing how far his dogs had gotten. They were almost to the mother and child. They paused, whipping around to look at him. He whistled, calling them. They bounded back, more than happy to return. They barrelled into him and Winston, licking at his hands and arms, leaving him covered in slobber, before taking off again to run around the Sycamore.

Will looked down at his hands, balling them into fists. The tendons stood and moved with the motion. There were some minor scars from brawls and callouses from shooting and hard work. Most of the scars he couldn't remember how he got them. As a teenager, he'd gotten in more fights than he cared to admit. His dad had finally grounded him to the shop to keep him out of trouble.

Sometimes, he wondered what he was capable of if push came to shove. He'd once almost beat a boy to death after he caught him abusing a cat. He and his friends had been dangling it by its tail after they'd tied up its legs, shaking it back and forth to listen to it wail. Will had grabbed the boy holding the cat by the hair and shoved him to the ground, hitting him till his buddies had grabbed him and hauled him off. It had devolved from there till Will had run away to keep from being killed himself.

He'd ended up with a busted nose, black eye, and two broken fingers. He took the cat home, afraid of what the group would do if he left there.

Will knew something dark crawled under his skin. Had felt it purring there, coiled in his chest. It always roared to life when he'd fought, making him feel more alive than any other time. His dad had seen it too. He'd taught him how to hide it, afraid of what would happen if any of the mafia saw it. And he'd taught him how to drown it out with liquor if it got too loud.

It had remained quiet for a long time. The rhythmic motion of having the same schedule kept it down. But after shooting those men, after getting attacked, he felt it again. It'd unfurled in him. His biggest clue was the fact the damn stag was back. It was a big fucking flag for him. Whenever it came around, he felt the most out of control. Even in the middle of the day, he could occasionally see it from the corner of his eye, lingering just out of view. Its heavy breathing and hoofbeats would resound in the back of his skull sometimes.

If he was being honest, it was probably why he was avoiding Hannibal. The doctor always saw more than he figured he would. Will didn't want him to see this side of him. He wanted to avoid him till the stag was gone at least. When he was back to being himself. Though, there was no telling when that would be.

Relaxing his hand, he stood from the bench. Too hot to stay at the park any longer, Will leashed his dogs and headed home.

The air conditioner in Will's apartment wasn't worth much, but it made his home more comfortable than the outside.

Unhooking the dogs, they all ran around panting as they looked for a cool spot to lay. Max tracked dirt into the place, a large pile falling around him as he settled comfortably next to the bed. As much as he needed a bath, Will really didn't have the energy to give him one. Maybe that would be his task for tomorrow, since he still had no plans to go back to work yet.

Will knew he couldn't avoid working forever. Not with vet bills and groceries. The tattoo shop alone cost a lot to keep it going. Will was grateful he didn't rent the place. He just needed another day or two to prepare himself.

Sighing, he sat on his bed, kicking off his boots. His feet ached from walking back and forth to the park so often. While being a waiter meant being on his feet a lot, being a tattooist meant he was sitting bent over just as much. He pulled off his socks to try and rub the ache away.

Working the arch of his foot, Will glanced at his alarm clock. It was closing on four. Too early for dinner or bed. He should probably run to the grocery store. It'd been a while since he restocked his fridge, but it was too hot to give him any real motivation to go. It would be better to wait till close to five after the heat had started to wane, but he wouldn't have to worry about getting caught in the dark.

Looking around his room, his stacked books caught his eye. He had a number of books he could read. He hadn't had the time to read for a while, not since he started picking up more shifts at *Royale.* The *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* sat on the windowsill, out of the way of the threat of any dogs. It'd been on his list need-to-read for a while now. His dad had read it a number of times. It had come second hand, his dad finding it when he'd taken Will to *GoodWill* for him to find new jeans. Many of the pages had their corners bent and stained. The cover was worn and torn, with scotch tape holding it together.

His dad had often picked up books for him when he had the budget for it, knowing that Will liked to read. He'd read in the office while he waited for his dad to finish, or at school when he had the time. His collection was rather eclectic because of his dad. It ranged from classics, to horror, to biographies, to mysteries, to how-tos.

The how-to books were usually picked up as a way to try and avoid calling someone to fix something. While Will did now know how to fix almost anything in his home, it had resulted in flooding his apartment at more than one point.

The classics tended to be Will's favorite, though he liked well-written mysteries. As a teen, he would try to figure out the killer before it was revealed. He'd create a profile of the killer and what he knew of them, and then base his guess of what he'd been told of the other characters. Most of the time, he got it right, but on a rare occasion, the author would surprise him. He didn't tend to read them now, since they tended to remind him of the career course he couldn't afford.

Standing, Will walked to the window and lifted it, flipping it over to read the back. It was almost too faded to read by this point. He ran his thumb over it, feeling his finger catch on the edge of the tape that had started to curl upward at the edges.

Taking it with him, he flopped back on the bed. It wouldn’t take him long to read it. It would also keep his mind off Hannibal. And all his other problems. At least for now.

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

So, sadly no Hannibal in this chapter. But we all know he won't let Will get away for long.

Also. Bev is queen. But, that's just my opinion.

Dinner

Chapter Summary

Will gets fed up with Hannibal, so he calls him.

Chapter Notes

I actually got through this chapter a lot faster than I anticipated. And Will kinda took the wheel with it. This should be interesting.

TW: Gore and mutilation (thanks Hannibal)

Not beta read

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will found himself standing in front of his now closed bathroom door, mouth hanging open. He'd just gotten out of the shower, and was about to pull some clothes out from his dresser when he'd looked at his bathroom door, remembering the coat that still hung out of sight. He stood in a towel, hair dripping water, frozen. His dogs gathered around him, sniffing at the gradually growing puddle under his feet, giving them tentative licks.

The damn doctor had stolen the coat.

Will hadn't noticed for the last few days, since his bathroom door had been left open, mostly because he hadn't wanted to look at it. He knew there wasn't much to be done by this point. There was no telling where that missing button had gone. And the dirt was now ingrained into the fabric, staining the pretty blue. It'd made him sick to his stomach.

So, he'd avoided it. Pretended that it wasn't hanging on the other side of the chipped door.

But now having finally worked up the courage to try and save what he could, he found himself standing shell shocked in front of the empty space where it used to hang. He reached out a tentative hand, pressing his fingers against the wood to be sure that it was really gone. That he wasn't dreaming or hallucinating. The cool wood told him that it really was gone.

Hannibal took it when he'd been drugged. It was the only explanation.

Why the hell had he taken the damn thing?

Will fumed, slamming the door open, about putting a hole in the wall. His dogs shied back, unsure what to do with his anger. He paced the small space, one hand pressed to his stomach, near the ship wheel tattoo. The other gripped the towel to his hips so it didn't fall as he stalked back and forth. His feet smacked against the wood floor, wet footprints trailing him.

That ridiculous, drug-happy, pigheaded doctor had *no issues* just doing whatever he pleased. He showed up when he wanted. Inserting himself into Will's life because he had the time and desire. He gave whatever gifts he wanted. Molly had technically been a gift, one he needed. And a coat, which he didn't. And he drugged people whenever he felt like it. Because he decided Will couldn't take care of himself, even though Will had been doing just fine doing so for the last few years. Despite what Bev and the other two might say.

Tugging at his earrings, Will twisted to look back to the bathroom door that had gradually swung back close as he'd paced. Hannibal had even left him his coat hanger. Like he thought it would be rude to take it. As though it wasn't rude to drug him, or to force himself into Will's home, or to take the goddamn coat that was technically Will's since it had been given to him as a gift.

He was a walking contradiction, and it drove Will half out of his head.

Storming to his dresser, he yanked it open, pulling out clothes and slamming them shut, hard enough that it rattled from the force.

What gave Hannibal the right to take his stuff? Or to drug him?

Fine. It wasn't that big of a deal anyway. He couldn't have fixed the coat, nor would he have ever worn it if he was being honest. He didn't have anywhere to wear something that nice to. As for the drugging, Will had no argument for that other than it was clear Hannibal had thought it was for the best. For his health or whatever pissant reason he'd used to justify it at the time.

If Hannibal was going to do whatever he wanted, regardless of what Will might want, then there shouldn't be any problems with Will returning the sentiment.

Will was avoiding him.

Not surprising, but not ideal either.

Hannibal let him, though he got regular updates from the men on guard about his whereabouts. He mourned the fact he hadn't placied them there before the incident that left Will injured. The fact that he had placed Will on the No Harm's list should have prevented anything from happening. But that was neither here nor there by this point. What was done was done. He simply had to adjust accordingly.

The park not far from the tattoo shop had apparently been the spot he'd decided on loitering around. It had made Hannibal wonder if Will really liked the city. If somewhere with more green and less concrete would suit him better. The picture of Will surrounded by trees and

bushes, much like a wolf when stalking its prey, rose to mind. Blue eyes shining in the dappled sunlight, focused and a striking blue.

Blood dripping from the mouth that ripped out his prey's throat was a gorgeous image.

Nothing of note had happened, but Hannibal could feel his patiences thinning. He wasn't sure how much longer he could take Will working not to see him. The monster in him gnawed around the edges.

Sighing softly, Hannibal leaned back in his office chair, enjoying the quiet between appointments. The rich toned curtains were pulled back, allowing the sunlight to warm the space, giving it an inviting air. It reflected off the dark leather chairs and the glossy top of the side tables.

He had just one more appointment before he was done for the day. He'd need to swing by *Alkis* for a bit to handle some other business, but Ms. Lounds still hadn't been found yet. Mr. Matthew was working on it, but most of the leads that Mr. Edwards had provided were turning up cold.

He'd also stationed men to go in and out of Dex periodically to try and sift her out. It was only a matter of time. She couldn't stay hidden from him forever. Not with so few being willing to help her.

Especially after Mr. Edwards' corpse was found strung up in front of Dex's front doors between two light poles.

He'd been found by an unfortunate couple, who were going to Dex for a secret hook up. The woman had screamed loud enough to wake half the block. The police promptly arrived after and quietly removed the body that had left both the man and woman vomiting onto the sidewalk. Not that it was grotesque enough to warrant such a violent reaction out of the pair.

Mr. Edwards' eyes and lids had been removed, so empty sockets stared sightless down at the entrance, blood crusting the edges. Lipless and tongueless, thirty coins stuffed inside his sewn shut mouth, placed there while he was still alive, so he could taste the tang of the coins. Blood had dried along the seam of his lips, dripping slowly down his chin. Cut from neck to pelvis, he'd been gutted like a pig, his stained shirt left unbuttoned to show off the clean slice. Birdsfoot Trefoil, white clover, orange lilies, and yellow carnations, built into a beautiful bouquet, were nestled in the empty cavern of his gut, dotted red with blood.

The printed off emails between him and Ms. Louds had been nailed to his hands and stuffed in the suit of his jacket, before being scattered on the ground below him. There would be no hiding who was responsible for it and why.

He'd survived most of it, since he hadn't been gutted till he was strung up. His intestines had been left in a pile under his feet, where pigeons and strays had gathered to nibble at it.

Hannibal's phone rang, interrupting his thoughts.

Glancing at it, he found it to be an unknown number. *Private* lit up the screen. Running his fingers over the I.D., curiosity piqued, he let it ring twice before hitting answer and picking it up.

“Dr. Lecter’s office. How may I help you?” he said, thoughts still halfway caught up on Ms. Lounds and Mr. Edwards. He hadn’t quite decided if she deserved the same artistry that Mr. Edwards had received. She was certainly cunning and driven enough to have earned some of his respect. But her point of interest had also roused his anger.

He would decide once she was within his grasp.

“Hello Dr. Lecter.”

Will’s voice stilled Hannibal’s thoughts, sharpening his attention to the sounds coming through the other end of the line. Snuffling and padding of dogs, distance footsteps, wind, driving cars. Will was outside on a walk with his dogs, though he hadn’t received any notification from his men that Will had left his apartment.

“Good evening Will,” Hannibal said after a brief pause. “I must admit to being surprised by your call. I wasn’t expecting it.”

“Even when you left your number for me?”

Will was teasing him. There was a slight lilt to his tone when he did, with certain vowels being drawn out and others cut short. And an accent started to slip out, one faint, almost worn away with time. Hannibal wondered if it came from the time he lived outside of Baltimore. It then had him wondering about Will’s life before the city. About his birthplace.

“I condemned it as a foolish hope,” Hannibal said, relaxing back into his chair, even as tension built up in his gut. Anticipation sparked up and down his spine. He found he rarely could guess what Will would do, but this felt like the start of something even more unpredictable. “But I am pleased nonetheless that you defied my expectations.”

A huff of laughter sounded from the other side of the line. “Always happy to please.”

Mirth crinkled the corners of Hannibal’s eyes. They both knew that wasn’t true. In fact, it was mostly the opposite. The only time Will Graham could be accused of trying to please was when he was working on a tattoo. And even then, he had his own code he followed.

A glance at the grandfather clock told Hannibal he had less than ten minutes before his next appointment. While he wanted to savor this conversation, he couldn’t be rude to Mr. Valantine either. “What do I owe the pleasure of this phone call? Ms. Katz had informed me that you were staying away from work the last few days. Taking a break is how she put it, I believe. I found myself surprised when she told me, since you’ve shown a rather reluctance for rest.”

It was true that Ms. Katz had told him. Even though his men gave him regular updates, he occasionally called the shop to see if Will was in. He had to put up the appearance that he didn’t know where the tattooist was or what he was doing.

A hum sounded down the line, and then the sound of barking that quickly grew distant. Will must have taken his dogs to the park again.

“Well, Dr. Lecter, I discovered the strangest thing this morning,” Will said, his tone light, sarcasm barely coloring his words. “As I was getting ready this morning, I found the coat you gave me was missing. What would you make of that?”

Hannibal tapped his fingers against his appointment book, thoughts spinning in different directions. It was clear that Will already knew he was the one who took it, though he had no proof. It was amusing that it took him this long to discover this missing garment.

“How interesting. Did you happen to move it to a different location?” Hannibal asked good naturedly, wondering how Will would respond to his insinuation of the problem being bad memory.

Will snorted. “Yes, it’s because I moved the damn thing and not because you took it after you *drugged* me.”

Hannibal’s lips quirked at the lack of anger in the words. Despite calling him a bastard at the time, it seemed Will didn’t really mind it all that much. If he had, he would have brought it up when he suddenly dropped in at Hannibal’s office. Instead, all he wanted to know was why Hannibal wanted to be his friend.

As though something as shallow as friendship could express what Hannibal wanted.

“To be fair,” Hannibal said, bringing his attention back to the conversation at hand, “I only took it because I knew there was no saving it. I wanted to replace it, since it was supposed to be a gift.”

“You could have asked.”

“You would have said no.”

“And you took it anyways, knowing what my answer would have been,” Will said, his tone more amused than incredulous. Anyone else would have been angry, or at least exasperated.

Another glance to the clock told Hannibal he had less than five minutes. Mr. Valantine was not a man who liked to be kept waiting. He was rather impatient and prone to getting what he wanted, regardless of what it took to get it. Hannibal had been debating what to do about that.

Sighing softly, Hannibal smoothed out his clothes as he stood, turning his attention back to Will. “I do hate to cut our conversation short, but I’m afraid I have another appointment soon. If you were calling about your gift, I promise to have it returned soon.”

“Keep it.”

Will’s abrupt words still Hannibal. “What do you mean, Will?”

Hannibal could hear the tattooist grinning as he said, “Keep it. I didn’t want it to begin with. It’s not like I could really wear it anywhere. It was too nice for me.” Hannibal opened his

mouth to argue against that point, but Will continued before he could. “But, I think you owe me for taking it. Tit-for-tat and all that.”

“And what would you ask of me?”

Interest curled like a lazy cat in his chest, more than pleased with this turn of events. He’d been debating how he was going to stage a ‘run-in’ with Will if he continued to avoid him.

“Dinner.”

Hannibal blinked, the only surprise he allowed to show. Contentment almost purred in him at the idea of being able to bring Will into his home and feed him. Put a little more weight on that thin frame. And he wanted to see just how much Will’s beautiful mind worked out when surrounded by everything of Hannibal's. Would he begin to piece things together, or would he continue to only see Hannibal as a therapist?

The next question that had been resting at the back of Hannibal’s mind the last few days was what he would do if Will did figure it out. Already a part of him revolted at the idea of killing the tattooist. He was too unique, too beautiful to end. He was also probably the only existence in the mundane world that could understand Hannibal. But, he posed a threat to Hannibal’s way of life. Even if the Baltimore’s police was rather incompetnnt and more than willing to stay out of mafia business, there were others who were more than a little interested in knowing his identity. And they would pay a high price for it.

“I’m more than willing to cook for you, as you know, William. When would—”

Will clicked his tongue, cutting Hannibal off. “Nope. That’s not how this is going to go.”

The abrupt refusal made Hannibal cock his head in interest. Surely Will wasn’t saying that he would cook for Hannibal. Not that there was some pleasure to be had at the idea of Will cooking for him. It was clear that the man didn’t typically cook. For him to do so for another was a gift in of itself, even if the quality wasn’t up to what Hannibal typically ate.

“Oh?”

Will hummed his confirmation.

“Then, what do you have in mind, Will?”

“I’m going to come pick you up after your last appointment, and then I’m taking you out to dinner.”

Hannibal frowned at the idea of eating out. Most of the restaurants did not meet his standards. The idea of eating something greasy and rather toxic was not appealing.

“And where would we be going?”

“Wherever I feel.”

“And where is that?”

“Not sure. I’m not hungry yet.”

Hannibal had to suppress a long suffering sigh. Will was purposefully being obscure, the joy he was taking in it palpable through the phone. The notion he was being toyed with didn’t normally sit well with Hanibal, but he found himself making an exception, as he tended to do when it came to things about Will. He vaguely wondered what trouble he would find himself in because of Will.

After a short pause, Hannibal finally said, “Very well. I am free any time after five this evening. Where would you like me to meet you?”

As much as he might loath eating somewhere of poor quality, he wouldn’t miss a chance to reestablish their relationship. It was tentative at best. Strained since the incident in his office, even with it due to embarrassment more than anything else. If Will learned of Hannibal’s other identity now, it would send him running. They needed a deeper connection before his other side was revealed.

Will held the phone away a moment as he yelled at his dogs. Then, he said to Hannibal, “Don’t worry about that. I’ll pick you up about 5:30.”

As far as Hannibal knew, Will didn't have a vehicle. The tattooist, up to this point, had walked or taxied everywhere. It was possible it was stored in a garage somewhere, though Hannibal didn’t have much hope in its model or make. Will seemed to regularly deny himself the nicer things.

But time was about up, so he said instead, “I look forward to it.”

“You should,” Will murmured into the receiver, something dark in his tone.

Hannibal paused, hairs rising on the back of his neck. The words contained a threat, but something else. Something more animalistic that Hannibal had only seen in Will once, briefly. His fingers tightened around the phone. Before he could say anything, Will had already hung up.

Hannibal looked at his phone, debating calling him back, but the grandfather clock chimed, echoing in the large room, telling him there was no more time. He would just have to wait till this evening when Will arrived.

He set his phone back on the desk, buttoning his jacket as he walked to the door to show Mr. Valantine in.

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

Will not lie to you darlins, I definitely put Will in a towel just because I could. There was no reasoning behind it at all.

Any guesses where Will is going to take Hannibal? To be fair, I plan on using my steadfast, ol' Hat to decide what happens next. Though suggestions will be put in it as well for the chance of being pull!

Surprises

Chapter Summary

Will take Hannibal for dinner.

Surprises all around.

Chapter Notes

Okay! The hat has spoke. Here were the contenders for this chapter:

- McDonalds (so cruel)
- a crab shack (my personal favorite offered)
- a dive bar (poor Hannibal)
- a nice restaurant (would be disappointed)
- a home cooked meal (I see something burned in the future)
- Royale (I feel Jack would be a problem)

Let's see what we got!

Also. The only warning I give is I surprised myself. And I did this on little sleep.

Not beta read

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will was outside Hannibal's office at exactly 5:30.

Hannibal checked only moments before to find the waiting room empty. He'd considered the possibility of the man backing out at the last minute, regardless of the fact he'd called only a few hours ago. He was well aware of the tattooist proclivity to let his anxieties get the better of him. With that in mind, his phone laid face up on the desk, ringer on.

When his grandfather clock rang at half-past five, he looked again, already convinced that Will wouldn't be out there. If he wasn't, Hannibal would give him an extra fifteen minutes before he called the tattoo shop to see if Ms. Katz could get a hold of the elusive man. While he did have people who could find out Will's number if needed, it was clear that Will didn't want that. The private number had told him as much. Hannibal would respect his wishes at the moment.

With enough time, Will would no doubt gift him his number. Hannibal just needed to be patient.

Though his concerns were unfounded when he opened the door to Will sitting cross legged in one of the waiting chairs. Will was staring off in the distance, head tilted a little back, eyes on one of the paintings. He didn't seem to hear the door open. Which gave Hannibal time to take in Will's appearance unobserved.

The tattooist had left behind his usual scraggly attire. His hair was styled, pushed back out of his face, except for one piece that strayed across his forehead. Like this, his earrings could be seen unimpeded. The silver pieces shined in the low light, the gems embedded in some glittering. From this distance, Hannibal couldn't make them all out, but he did note that Will's scruff was gone. He'd chosen to dress nicely too, though not to the same degree or preference of Hannibal's. Will hadn't doned the suit that wouldn't have done much for him, but instead left his usual plaid for a simple pair of khakis and a dark orange button up.

The entire ensemble left Hannibal a little lost for words. More for the fact of what they conveyed, than the look they produced.

Will removed his usual barriers. For him.

Hannibal preened.

"Dear Will," Hannibal said, stepping out into the foyer. Flashes of brilliant blue before Will's eyes dropped to Hannibal's shoes and he rose from the seat. Keys dangled from his fingers, twirling and catching between nimble fingers. Hannibal supposed it was acting as a substitute for Will messing with his earrings. "I hope I haven't kept you waiting."

Will snorted, turning briefly away before facing Hannibal, feet braced apart, hands sliding into his pockets. "We both know you didn't. That'd be rude."

Hannibal inclined his head slightly, enjoying the way the smirk twisted Will's features. "I do abhor rudeness."

Will's eyes darted up, landing around Hannibal's nose and mouth, reading something there. His eyebrows pinched and then suddenly relaxed, interest sparking in his eyes. It was as though he'd slotted another piece into the puzzle in his head.

"You find it intolerable."

Will's words were a statement, they didn't need any confirmation from Hannibal.

Though Hannibal agreed anyway. "In a world full of so many atrocities, being polite to one another is the least we could do, no?"

Will hummed, eyes running up and down the doctor. It made Hannibal wonder what thoughts were running behind those expressive eyes. What exactly that fascinating mind was putting together.

And then Will abruptly turned away, moving toward the elevator. Hannibal was aware he favored using the stairs. Which meant the elevator was for him. “We should go. Wouldn’t want to be late.”

Curiosity burned through Hannibal, but he silently went back into his office to retrieve his things, locking the door. It was clear that Will had no intention of revealing his hand. It would be interesting to see where this night would lead them.

Where Will was leading him.

_____

Will led him to a silver Civic that was parked just outside, hazard lights flashing. The door man murmured goodbye to them, particularly to Hannibal when they passed. He didn’t have any regards towards Will. Mostly saw him as someone who’d disappear eventually.

Will sensed the surprise from the doctor, who no doubt thought he had no car, or drove something not as nice.

Will wouldn’t tell him just yet that he was right.

This was Bev’s car. His was a two door, bench seat truck from the early nineties. He had a tendency to have problems arise at the most inopportune moments with it. Because of this, he’d asked to borrow Bev’s, even though a small part of him had laughed at the idea of Hannibal getting into a truck that had more rust than paint. It taken bribing her with good whiskey to let her give it without knowing why he was asking for it.

“I know it’s no Bently, but it drives just fine,” was what he said to Hannibal’s surprise, poking a little at him. The mirth in his eyes when he looked over at the doctor said as much.

Laughter huffed behind him as he walked to the drivers side, clicking the keys so the doors unlocked.

Sliding in, he found Hannibal already in and watching him, door shut and belt buckled. If he didn’t know the man better, Will would call his actions excited, though only pieces of his emotions showed on his face. A slight lifting of the brows and tilt of the lips told. Or maybe slipped out would be the better term for what happened, since the doctor kept such a tight hold on his expressions and what he allowed others to see.

Like his distaste for rude behavior.

Though that was a fairly mild way to phrase how the doctor felt about it. Will had seen something darker about his reactions to rude behavior. That much Will had been able to read. But it had been there only briefly, before it disappeared behind the ever present mask. The doctor’s dislike for anything rude explained a number of the things that had happened in their rather short time knowing each other. It also gave Will another insight into the man, giving what he knew of him a little more depth, flushing out his character.

What was emerging was intriguing. More so than Will had ever expected it to be.

Turning off the hazards, Will flicked on his blinker and pulled away from the curb. Hannibal was still watching him, eyes sharp on his profile.

Will fought his embarrassment at being so closely regarded. “See something you like?”

The question wasn’t really one. Will knew from the way he had looked at him when he’d first come out of his office that he appreciated Will’s efforts. He’d read the appreciation that had lined Hannibal’s body when he’d looked at him. It was also clear that it was distracting Hannibal to a certain extent. Which was good since that was one of the reasons why Will had ditched his normal clothes and scruff.

He felt particularly naked without his usual short layer of beard. He hadn’t expected to feel so exposed without it. Like he was leaving a vital point open.

Running a hand over his neck, he felt the keen prick of Hannibal’s attention as his eyes followed the movement, tracing over the way Will’s fingers flexed and curled.

“I must admit that I am pleased with this development. It is as though I am seeing the actual you,” Hannibal said, accent thickening as he spoke. His hands were folded over the leather briefcase that rested on his lap. It had been the only thing he’d taken from his office when he’d locked it up for the night.

It was well worn and foreign made. It spoke of care and taste. And maybe a little sentiment, though Will didn’t think that was the right word for it. It was more that Hannibal took care of things he considered his. He was possessive. And careful. Never giving anyone more than needed. Which explained why he was so controlled over his emotions and words.

He had a tendency to say one thing and mean something completely different.

Though Will wasn’t all that different. He had a habit of doing one thing and having something else completely different in mind. The perfect distraction.

Leaning back, Will kept one hand on the wheel as he reached to tug on his earrings. Hannibal always saw more than he planned. He could be seeing more now and just humoring Will because he wanted to see what would happen next. He was curious. Like a large cat.

It was better to keep the curiosity on Will before it turned to where they were going.

“Are you seeing the real me, Dr. Lecter?”

The question was more to buy him time than anything else. He knew Hannibal saw *more,* but he wasn’t sure if the doctor saw him. Doctors, Will had found, tended to fall on one side of the spectrum or the other. They were altruistic or self-serving. Sometimes a mix because they found pride in being able to help others, but not because they were helping others. It was because they could lord the fact they could over others. A power trip in other words.

Neither tended to see Will. One believing too much in the good of others and the other too focused on themselves to see much else.

He knew Hannibal didn’t fall into either. So, where that put him was the question.

“Letting people see what lies underneath is difficult, knowing that human nature is fickle and likely to turn away from that which is different from ourselves. Most hide the aspects of themselves that they believe society would find undesirable. Even friends can hide parts of themselves from one another, as can lovers, because they fear being rejected for who they are.” Hannibal tilted his head, dark eyes focused on Will’s face, reading the side profile. “Are you letting me see the real you, William?”

A question for a question. Not surprising coming from a psychiatrist, but still annoying. As was the rest of the extra stuff. Will preferred when Hannibal did the talking.

Shifting, Will tilted his head so that his throat was exposed a little more, the setting sun catching his profile. With it still summer, they still had a few hours of light, but it was fading fast. Before long, the city would be twinkling with neon lights, calling those looking for temptation like a siren. “Are you trying to see the real me? Most people are happy with what they are presented with. They would rather others not pry further.”

“Though you can whether they wish it or not.”

Will’s fingers tightened on the wheel. Hannibal saw it.

Instead of looking over, Will ran his fingers over his earrings, letting the chains and gems run under his thumb pad. Hannibal was trying to unnerve him for some reason. He was poking at him, like he wanted to discover how Will worked when under the microscope. Most didn’t like how that ended for them.

Finally Will smirked, settling deeper into his seat. His thumb tapped against the wheel. “Does that trouble you doctor? Afraid of me digging your skeletons out from the closet?”

“Of course not,” Hannibal murmured, eyes almost glowing. Will could believe him. “You’ll find I am fond of the unconventional. One should not be shamed for being unique or different. For liking different things. You may even find we are more alike than we are different if you do enough digging and are open minded, which I believe you are.”

Will ran a hand over his mouth hiding his grin. Casting a glance over as he pulled into an empty parking space, he said to Hannibal who was just now beginning to look at where they were, “I suppose that’s good, since we like very different things when it comes to food. You might even find you like mine, if you are open minded enough. Which, I believe you are, considering your words.”

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iBar had been a dive bar Will had been dragged into by Bev, Zeller, and Price once before. While it hadn’t been his favorite place, it was worth seeing Hannibal’s expression when they’d stopped in front of the white door with neon lights hung over it.

But then Hannibal had looked at Will and seen. He saw why Will had led him here, or at least had an inkling. He smiled at Will, leading the way inside, even going so far as to hold the door open for him. The ass.

Now seated, they stuck out like sore thumbs. Will had known that would be the case, though having people continuously glance at them made him want to snarl as much as it turned him red. They needed to mind their own business rather than stare at them. There was a couple directly to their left that had been staring at them since they walked in. As had the bartender and waitress, for two different reasons.

Hannibal, for all his plaid three piece suit and foreign shoes, didn't look uncomfortable, though he looked out of place. Instead, he regarded the menu with veiled hostility. Much like when one is looking at something that is stuck to the bottom of their shoe.

Will already knew what he was getting, so he watched Hannibal's expression vary in distaste as he reviewed each item with his head propped on his hand.

He cataloged the way Hannibal's brows quirked or lips pursed. A crinkle near the eye and tensing around the brow. They were all minor movements, easily missed by anyone not paying close attention. All very controlled. Just the bare minimum being allowed through. He wondered what would happen if Hannibal ever let himself completely let go of that control.

The waitress walked over with their waters.

A small thing, her dark curls pulled back into a ponytail. She'd introduced herself as Charlotte. Will suspected it wasn't her actual name. Her gaze darted between the two, eyes dark as she took in the doctor. She found him the more handsome of the two of them. But Will also knew by the way she wouldn't look at him or Will for very long that she didn't trust men. He could take a few guesses as to why.

Setting the glasses down, she pulled out a small pad and pen. "What can I get you guys to eat?"

Even her voice was soft, like she could disappear into the background if she tried hard enough. Having attempted that himself for a good number of years, Will knew it wouldn't work as well as she hoped. Not being as pretty as she was.

Glancing at the way Hannibal pursed his lips, Will said, "The Shrimp Jambalaya for me." Before she could turn towards Hannibal to ask what he wanted, Will continued, "And he'll try your Maryland Cream of Crab."

Hannibal's eyes flashed at Will, his irritation showing, but the girl's face lightened a little, a small smile appearing as she turned to Hannibal. "Oh, that's a good one. No one's ever complained. Martin says it's the best he's ever had."

Hannibal turned his attention to Charlotte, since it would be rude not to. Placidly pleasant was what Will would call that particular expression. When it was clear that he had little interest in what the other person said but felt obligated to listen. "Do you trust Mr. Martin's judgment on food?"

A one shoulder shrug was the response as she looked down to put the pad back into her apron pocket. "I figure since he's the cook, he has to say that about it, right? No one would want to eat it otherwise."

Will snorted into his water. Hannibal stared hard at her, trying to decide if she was joking or not.

She was gone, heading towards the kitchen before Hannibal could ask for something else.

Will fidgeted with his napkin, avoiding looking at the man who was trying to stare holes into his head. He was sure Hannibal was anything but pleased with where he had picked. But, if they were playing the game tit-for-tat, this felt well worth it. Even if he would no doubt pay for it later. Hannibal had a way of getting even.

“So, Will,” Hannibal started slowly, watching the tattooist look around the room, marking the way they were watched by the others. He could see Will’s brain turning, putting people together like a child puts a puzzle together. “Why choose this restaurant?”

Hannibal hesitated over using the word restaurant. There had been a hitch before he’d said it. He clearly saw it far below what he would consider to be one.

“I have fond memories here.”

It wasn’t a lie.

Hannibal lifted his brow questioningly. He clearly couldn’t see how he would.

“I’ve been here once before,” Will admitted, leaning back and crossing his arms. It hadn’t changed much. Just the staff and a few of the decorations. It felt a little like a place out of time. “A few years ago. It was not long after my dad had died.”

There was almost a predatory likeness in the way Hannibal watched him.

Rubbing his nose, Will looked up at Hannibal’s face, focusing on the corner of his mouth. “Bev basically drug me out of my bed after I’d been holed up in my apartment for five days. She’d shoved me into her car with Jimmy and Brian already in the back seat.”

“Ms. Katz can be highly persuasive when she choses.”

“I think you mean forceful.”

Hannibal smiled slightly. “That too, though she continuously has your well-being in mind.”

“She does,” Will agreed, grinning. “But, they took me here. Got me drunk. And then we all sang karaoke. Horrendous karaoke.”

Hannibal’s eyebrow twitched. “They have karaoke here?”

“Not anymore.”

Hannibal smiled, mirth dancing in his eyes. He couldn’t help but wonder exactly what Will’s voice sounded like when he sang. If he was a tenor or if his voice dip lower than suggested. “I am afraid I cannot picture you singing karaoke in front of anyone. Even those who would grace an establishment such as this.”

“I was drunk.”

“Even drunk, I would think your empathy would make it difficult to do something like that.”

“Did I mention I was very drunk? I have no memory of actually doing it, but Bev had someone video it from the crowd. So now she has eternal proof.”

“That I’m sure she flaunts around.”

Will nodded, a pained expression twisting his face. “Every New Year’s.”

Hannibal actually laughed, though it was nothing more than a deep chuckle. Soft and low. “Perhaps if I win over her affections, she’ll indulge my wishes and allow me to see it.”

Wrinkling his nose, Will ran a hand over his neck. Without the layer of hair, the skin felt chilled. “I doubt you’ll have to work very hard. She already likes you.”

Hannibal looked overly pleased at Will’s words.

“But she likes Molly more.”

Hannibal, somehow, looked even more pleased with that. “I am happy to hear that. I did bring her to you after all. I would feel responsible if she was an ill fit for you and your shop.”

“So you’ve said before.”

The couple was still staring at them. It was distracting. Will wasn’t sure if it was just because they were clearly out of place. Their well pressed shirts and nice dress were starkly different from the ratty tees and worn jeans that the couple was wearing. But the look in their eyes told Will it was something else. The man and woman, older than him, had been watching like they knew Will. Or at least recognized him.

It made the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end.

He almost grabbed Hannibal. Made an excuse and told him it was just a joke. That this wasn’t where he’d planned on taking them.

But then Charlotte moved to them, handing them a bill. They looked at it, both pulling out some cash, before saying their thanks and telling her not to bother with change. She thanked them and they chatted a bit. It was clear they were regulars and the waitress seemed to like them. They smiled at her, faces soft and open, before linking arms and walking out.

His overactive imagination got him again. Cursing himself silently, he shifted his attention back to Hannibal.

“So you chose this place for a memory you cannot recall?” Hannibal asked, sensing a lull in Will’s attention but unsure of what was pulling it. The couple had seemed to interest him, but he couldn’t make out why.

Will laughed, pulling at his earrings. “I guess I chose it because I thought I would hate it when I first came. But then, despite my first impressions, I ended up liking it.”

The meaning wasn’t missed.

Before Hannibal could respond, Charlotte returned, dishes in hand.

They ate the rest in silence.

———

After they had paid, as in Will forced Hannibal to allow him to pay, they stood next to the Civic looking at Baltimore’s nightlife mill around them. Two figures were walking towards them, leaning into each other as they enjoyed a stroll in each other's company. A group of teens were walking in the other direction, yelling and shoving, clearly gearing up for a long night.

Will wasn’t sure what to say now that there was no bar music to fill the silence. They hadn’t returned to the topic from before dinner. Will didn’t really want to.

“Are you planning on returning me my coat?”

Will hadn’t meant to say that, but he found it wasn’t untrue either. He’d grown attached to the ruined garment and wanted it back, regardless of its state. Even if it meant he’d never wear it and that it would collect dust. It was still his to decide what to do with.

Hannibal turned to him, evaluating Will closely before stepping closer. Will fought the urge to put space between them. He also fought the urge to step closer. Instead, he stubbornly remained rooted, looking at Hannibal’s nose.

“I’m afraid I have already gotten rid of it,” he said, looking down at Will. Despite their closeness in height, it still irked Will that the man could look down on him.

“Even if I ask politely?” Will asked, jutting his chin out.

Hannibal thought a moment, eyes fathomless. Slowly, so that Will could pull away if he wanted, Hannibal reached up and placed a hand to the side of Will’s head, threading his fingers through the curls. His thumb brushed over Will’s earrings, stilling him.

His hand felt unnaturally warm against Will’s skin.

Hannibal leaned in a little closer. This stance was similar to the one they shared in the office. “I was hoping you would allow me to gift you something else instead.” Another brush along his earrings. A warm shiver ran down Will’s spine. “Something you would be inclined to wear more often.”

Possessive.

The thought barreled into Will’s mind, reminding him of what he had already put together about the doctor. He couldn’t bring himself to care.

Taking a moment to steady himself, Will looked away, down the sidewalk to gather his thoughts. He wasn't sure he'd be able to knowing how Hannibal was looking at him. It was intoxicating.

The couple who'd been walking toward them had stopped under a street light, speaking softly. It was the couple from before. In the bar.

Will froze, really looking at them. The pair were, overall, easily forgotten. No distinct markings. Not overly attractive or noticeably ugly. No name brand clothing or notable prints. Neither surprisingly tall or markedly short.

They were built to fade into the background and be forgotten about.

They wrapped around one another, the woman almost bear hugging the man as she pressed her face into his chest. And the man was leaned over so his head was resting on her shoulder. He looked straight at Will and Hannibal.

Watchful eyes.

Will knew those kind of eyes.

Fear rushed through him, his hands snapping up to grab ahold of Hannibal's arms. He ignored the questions that the doctor was asking him. They were too far from the door of the bar and it would take too long to open the car doors.

Making a decision, Will grabbed Hannibal, heart lurching into overdrive, as the couple pulled apart. They were out of time.

He shoved Hannibal behind him as the woman pulled out a handgun from behind the man's back, lifting it to aim at them, and fired.

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

Whop.

On a serious note, I was going to say something about this at the last chapter, but I also wanted to say something now.

The comments you guys leave are the absolute best thing. Sometimes, I'm having a really shitty day and I get a comment, and it can just make it for me. I don't think I can really express how much your support and comments do for me. I know I don't often

reply to you guys (unfortunately I'm excellent at talking myself out of things), but I read every one of them and am very, very grateful for all of them.Sometimes, they make me laugh, when I'm feeling sad. Or they give me ideas (ahem, ahem, a lovely comment of pearls and necklaces that got stuck in my head for days). Or they just bring me joy. You guys are absolutely amazing, wonderful, beautiful creatures. Just wanted you to know that.

Thank you so much.

Bullets, Bruises, & Professions

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal handle the situation.

Will has an epiphany.

Chapter Notes

Boom. Four days. I'm feeling pretty good about this fact.

I also might have felt bad about leaving you hanging there.

TW: Blood, depictions of gore

Not beta read

See the end of the chapter for more notes

White hot pain ripped through Will's thigh as he stumbled back, shoving himself and Hannibal behind the Civic. A second gun started going off as Will pushed Hannibal to the pavement, using his body to cover the doctor's. He was crouched over him, trying to spread himself out wide enough to shield as much as possible.

Hannibal grabbed his hips and twisted, hauling them so that they were partially covered under the vehicle. Will found himself pinned under Hannibal. His arms shot out to wrap around the older man to try and guard what he could.

Glass exploded as bullets hit both the car windows and the bar windows, raining down around them. There was so much screaming. Though Will couldn't tell where it was coming from.

Will flinched as one of the tires took a bullet, giving a loud bang. Metal screeched as bullets penetrated it. Bev was going to kill him for this. If the two gunmen didn't get to him first.

He buried his face in Hannibal's neck, breathing hard where neck met shoulder. His hands wrapped around the doctor's head to try and protect him from debris.

Hannibal, in turn, had wrapped himself around Will, keeping him tight against him. All there was to do was wait for the barrage to stop and hope neither got hit before it did.

Will was fed up with all these near death experiences. He'd done his best to keep his head down and mind his own business, but apparently someone didn't care about that. If he survived this, he was going to hunt down Freddie himself and take a good long time killing her. After he found out who exactly she had told about Will saving Abigail. First Winston and now Hannibal.

He was done playing by anyone else's rules.

When the gunfire paused telling Will they were reloading, he pushed away from Hannibal, a harsh, "Stay here," leaving him as he scrambled out from under the car. He yanked open the driver-side door, hands steady despite the pounding of his heart. He only had moments before they were shooting again. Kneeling to keep his head hidden behind the car door, he reached under the seat and pulled out his pistol.

Standing just enough to see through the busted door window, he aimed. The pair stood only feet from the front of the car. The rest of the street had cleared at this point. Will bet that they only had minutes before they'd hear sirens. He fired, aiming for the woman first. They had worked their way slowly over to the car, trying to get a better aim on either of them.

She was closer, blocking his shot to the man. So he shot at her first.

Catching her in the shoulder, she screamed, dropping the gun.

The man swung his gun towards Will, firing before he'd finished aiming.

Will ducked, pulling himself up into the car. Trying to squish under the steering wheel wasn't ideal, but it was the only spot easily available. And he only needed to fit till the man needed to reload. He'd counted every shot, knowing he wouldn't have much time to get another shot in.

The problem was that he knew he hadn't killed the woman. He'd only gotten her shoulder. She could theoretically fire using her other hand. He would be taking a chance that she wasn't waiting for him to pop his head out.

Reaching around, Will slid the seat back as far as it would go, giving him more room to maneuver. By this point the windshield had already been taken out.

Bev was never going to let him borrow her car again.

Or let him out of her sight, for that matter.

She and Molly had been excited when they'd fished out what he was up to. Will never asked for Bev's car. He knew he was going to have to give her something when he did. Molly being pleased had been surprising. She'd smiled softly down at her hands, rotating the marriage band she still wore, even though her husband had been gone for a while.

“I think you both deserve to be happy,” is what she had said when he caught her expression. “And you seem to make each other happy.”

“I think you are finally about to get laid,” is what Bev had practically sung right after, looking too much like the cat who’d gotten the cream.

While that hadn’t been on the itinerary for his plans, neither had *this* .

He hoped Hannibal was okay. Maybe he shouldn’t ask people on dates. They never seemed to end well. But this one was certainly at the top.

Fuck it. It was the top.

Tensing, Will braced his arms against the seat and wheel, ready to spring up. The gun was a steadying weight in his hand.

A pause in the gunfire. Will shoved himself up, slamming his shoulder into the steering wheel. Will twisted, pointing in the direction where the gunfire had been coming from. The man was running for the bar door. They both knew he wouldn’t have time to reload before Will fired at him.

Will pulled the trigger and he hit the ground. Blood pooled under him.

Sighing, he pulled himself further into the seat, setting the gun on top of the middle console. Sirens were wailing. The cops would be here soon. And wouldn’t that be hell trying to explain. His heart still raced, but tremors were just beginning to work their way through him. The shock of everything was finally beginning to set in. He wouldn’t be surprised if he threw up. Spicy cajun and nasty surprises rarely ended well.

Closing his eyes, he clenched his teeth, counting down from ten to try and calm himself. Reminding himself that he was okay. Hannibal was probably okay.

He needed to check on him. But his throat was too dry to say anything. And his legs felt a little like jello now with the adrenaline waning. He could check in a minute. Or Hannibal will have by that time gotten out from under the car and he—

The woman was missing.

Will jerked, eyes snapping open.

Fucking shit.

He’d gotten too focused on getting the man he got inside he’d forgotten about her. He reached for his gun.

Arms wrapped around his throat before he could grab it, hauling him backwards out of the car and into the street. His knees scraped across the pavement as he tried to get his feet back under him. She wasn’t that tall. He could probably shake her off if he could just stand up. She bent over him, planting one off on one of his ankles to keep him down, her arms like vices

around his neck. There was a burn in the back of his throat and lungs. If he could think past the panic, he might have commended her for it considering he'd shot her in the shoulder.

Reaching up, he tried to pry her arms off from around his throat. Her arms tightened, fingers digging into where they were anchored to keep him from breaking free. Spots were already dotting his vision. It wouldn't be long till he was unconscious, and then dead.

He was going to be dead very soon if he—

She was gone. Will fell flat on his back, gasping, feeling the searing burn as fresh oxygen flooded his system.

Survival instincts had him twisting, pushing himself to his feet so assess the danger. But he'd only made it to his hands and knees before the woman's body hit the pavement, a large, bloody smile slicing across the column of his throat. Wet, gurgling noises slipped out of her, her body convulsing as it was wracked with pain and shock.

Looking up, he found Hannibal looking down at the woman, scalpel in hand. He was panting, suit ruined with glass cuts and grime. His hair, for the first time, was not slicked back, but fell in front of his face.

Then, they made eye contact.

Anger. Pure, unadulterated rage burned in those strange colored eyes. A rage Will had never seen in anyone looked back at him. Righteous anger. The kind that razed forests and leveled mountains. It was the kind that would challenge even the gods if it felt like it had to. Will had never seen anything so intense and captivating.

But seeing Will, alive and relatively unharmed all things considered, the anger faded. Panic and euphoria in equal measures took its place, swirling in those dark eyes. Panic over Will's well being. Euphoria in his kill, and Will's. He was pleased with how this encounter had ended. Could almost taste the pleasure.

Will wondered if those same emotions were reflected in his own eyes.

"Should have gone for the eyes, William," was all Hannibal said, straightening his jacket, scalpel disappearing.

Will watched from the backseat of the Civic as men in black suits walked around the street, cleaning it up and removing the bodies. There were a few talking to *iBar's* owner, handing the man a check. Pale faced and shaking, the man took it without question before disappearing back into his establishment.

The man who had shot at them wasn't dead. He'd been carried off into a black van between two men, groaning from the pain. Will had decided not to consider what would happen to him.

Two of the men in suits were speaking quietly to Hannibal near the front of the car.

Hannibal was standing, dirty but unruffled, with his hands clasped behind his back, eyes down, lips pursed. The only sign he'd been in a fight, other than his clothes being filthy, was a small cut near his eye. It was probably from a piece of flying glass.

Hannibal looked in deep contemplation, eyes far away. The other two looked to be waiting for orders.

No. They were waiting for orders.

These men were under Hannibal.

Looking at his hands, Will found them completely steady. Even with the blood rushing through him, the bitterness of panic still lingering in the back of his throat, he was completely steady. Will didn't want to think too deeply about that. Or anything really.

His leg throbbed. It was only a flesh wound thankfully. He didn't want stitches or to see a doctor. He'd forgotten about it till he sat down after Hannibal's men arrived. It had burned when he sat. Blood had caused it to stick to the wound, so when he sat, it had tugged the material free from it. He'd cussed softly under his breath, pressing his hand against it to try and stop the bleed and burn.

He had bandages at home that he could probably use.

Blood was running down his leg, soaking into his sock. Not the most pleasant sensation. It made him itch. Like a bug crawling down his leg.

"You have glass in your hair."

Hannibal was standing in front of him, apparently having finished his discussion.

Will's hair, at one point having been styled, now hung around his face, obscuring his vision. Reaching up, he pushed a piece out of his face, feeling the dust and dirt clinging to it. He didn't doubt that there was glass in it. It was a complete mess. Why not add a little glass into the mix.

It was going to be a pain in the ass to wash later.

"And you have a leg wound," Hannibal continued, noting the blood staining Will's pants. Not just from the bullet wound, but on his knees as well. It must have happened when the woman pulled him out of the car. Though it could have also happened when he'd crawled out from under it. With the amount of glass and debris that littered the ground, it wasn't surprising some had cut through his pants.

Hannibal's mouth pursed in displeasure, the skin around his eyes tightening. Watching his expression carefully, Will tried to see past the calm mask that had reappeared with the arrival of the men in suits. It had gone up like a wall when the cars had screeched to a halt in the road, men filing out and beginning to handle the situation like clockwork. Hannibal had become a distant rock in the middle of the ocean, unflinching in the crashing waves.

Seeing men waiting to talk to the doctor privately, Will had limped back to the car, more than ready to sit down for a bit.

Now, Hannibal stood in front of him, face soft. Will wondered which was the real him. Or if they were both just masks, easily put on and taken off as the situation called for them. Maybe what he'd seen of the doctor up to this point had only been a mask.

Hannibal knelt in front of him, hands gentle as they pulled the material away to get a better look at the bullet wound. "I do not think stitches will be needed, but it does need to be cleaned and bandaged," he said after a moment, fingers running lightly over the mark. He then moved to Will's knee, noting the glass and rocks still in the skin. "This will require more work I am afraid. You still have material in the wounds that need to be removed before being cleaned."

Will just watched him, head tilted to lean on the seat, hands hanging limply between his legs, one still clinging to the gun. After what happened the last time he set it down, he wasn't too willing to part with it yet.

Hannibal looked up at him, seeing the barrier Will had up. So he focused on his injuries instead.

Shifting so that he sat between Will's legs, he reached up. Hannibal took Will's head in his hands, lifting it up and moving it gently one way and then the other, as he evaluated the damage done to his neck. An ugly darkening bruise was already appearing. He ran his hands carefully down his throat, checking the damage.

"No permanent damage done," he murmured, pleased by what he'd found. He let Will go, but didn't back away, content to stay close and look up at him. Will stared down at him, thumb running over his pistol. "You will most likely experience some discomfort for a bit, but nothing to worry about. I suspect the bruising will look worse than it is."

They stared at each other, letting the noise around them fill the space. The sirens had disappeared at some point. But the men around them were making a racket as they cleaned up. Will hadn't figured everything out, but he was getting there. There were only a few types of people who warranted this kind of backup. Or authority. Politicians, the super wealthy with something to hide, and high ranking mafia members.

Hannibal was no politician.

For as dark as Hannibal's depths might be, and as charismatic and charming as he could be, he wasn't a politician. While he could slide seamlessly in amongst them, he wasn't one of them.

And as wealthy as he was, he was too in his element in this chaos for him to be a simple elite with something he wanted to hide. Most normal, wealthy people, would be a wreck after something like this. And they wouldn't have been able to slice open another's throat with such graceful beauty.

Which left one option.

“Nothing to worry about, Dr. Lecter,” Will said, voice rasping, back straightening as he pulled himself off the seat. Even with it sounding like gravel, the mockery was hard to miss. He probably shouldn’t be speaking at all. For several reasons. But he just didn’t care. “Should I be worried about you? Or should I be worried of you?”

Most high ranking mafia members were known. They tended to flaunt their power and wealth, catching the eyes of those they could use to help increase their influence and power of their group. They never outright called themselves mafia however. Businessmen was what they tended to say when asked their job title. Will supposed that wasn’t a complete lie when he thought about what their profession entailed.

They were just more ruthless than most business men.

The Verger’s were probably the most well known, hidden in plain sight group who did this. Everyone knew that anyone who did business with the Vergers were either dirty or mafia related. That or they were desperate. Desperate people always did stupid things.

There were other groups, smaller, less powerful groups, that did the same. Some tried to use it to persuade others to join their group. Or to make them appear bigger than they were.

The Maestro was often seen at symphonies, engaging with music lovers. It was said he played the violin beautifully and could even be taught by him if you proved to be promising enough.

The Red Dragon, a loner who had only one other member, was one of the few who avoided the spotlight, though even his name was known to the public. He didn’t appear in public due to his self consciousness over his looks. Though that hadn’t stopped him from being good at what he did.

There was only one no one knew.

The Chesapeake Ripper, the leader of the Ripper Mafia.

They had remained in the shadows for the last decade. They had appeared virtually out of nowhere, removing many of the previous mafia leaders within a single night. Their bodies had been found three days later, in the early morning outside the cops main police department, forming a recreation of the painting *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci. Their killings had only gotten more elaborate after that. No one knew what they looked like. What their profession was. Or even their first name. They were a complete mystery.

Except now. When Will had the Chesapeake Ripper kneeling at his feet.

Hannibal’s hands reached up, curling around his calves, thumbs running over the muscles, massaging them. Hands that could no doubt snap a person's neck in an instant were being used to soothe and gentle the last of the tension from Will. “No,” he said softly, accent thick and uncontrolled. The words were almost a purr. A little blood had dripped from the cut on his face, the ruby color stark against his skin.

Will met his gaze. His eyes were almost shining as they looked at him. He knew Will had figured it out. And he was practically preening over it.

“Never, dearest William.”

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

So what'cha gonna do now Will?

I also want to say, I have a very limited knowledge when it comes to the medical field. And I wasn't sure how I would explain why I looked up 'choking and medical remedies' to anyone haha. So, if someone sees something medically incorrect about what I've written, please let me know!

Another pointless note, if anyone was confused/curious about why Hannibal told Will to go for the eyes, rather than the throat, it's because eyes are considered a weak point for most creatures. For example, if you have a shark biting you and refusing to let go, you are supposed go for the eyes because it will force them to let go. Same idea here. They also are more likely to be left open, unlike the throat which is seen as a vulnerable point and tended to be better guarded.

No Harm's List

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal have a conversation. Will needs to make a choice.

Chapter Notes

William Graham gives me fucking whiplash sometimes. Honestly.

So have fun dealing with that, dear readers. I apologize in advance.

Not beta read.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The car ride was silent. Will stared out the window, head leaned against it, watching buildings slip by, mind slipping back to run over every exchange he'd had with Hannibal up to this point. His thumb ran over the butt of his pistol, where it still dangled from his fingers between his legs. He felt a little idiotic needing to get shot out and watch Hannibal slit someone's throat to figure out who he really was.

It wasn't as though there were any obvious signs, but Will saw more than others. He should have pieced it together sooner. If only because it took someone stranger than himself to want to be his friend. Even Bev could be thrown in that category when he thought about it.

Bev. He wasn't sure what he was supposed to say to her. He needed to call her. He told her he'd get her the Civic back tonight. Though, if he didn't and didn't contact her, she'd come to her conclusions. Might be better that way. It would at least buy himself some time. Push of his ass chewing until tomorrow. Both about the state of her car and the state of himself.

After this, she might insist he walk around in bubble wrap. And with a bodyguard. Not that he could afford one.

Sighing, Will closed his eyes, trying to focus his brain on something else.

Coming to a stop light, the Bentley hummed softly, classical music gently filling the space between the two men. Hannibal didn't seem bothered by the silence. He leaned back in his seat, one hand on the steering wheel while the other rested on the console between them. Like he was asking for Will to take it. But those dark eyes hadn't looked at him once since they'd gotten in the car.

Not that Will had looked at him since Hannibal assured him that he had no plans of harming him. The man had knelt between his legs for a while, fussing over the wounds on his leg. He'd told Will that he would have to wait till he had a proper kit so he could remove the glass and clean the wounds before bandaging them.

He'd only stood when his car arrived. Running a critical gaze over him, Will couldn't figure out where he was hiding that scalpel. Logically, it would be up his sleeve, but he didn't move like it was. One of his men gave him the key, and he'd turned back to extend his hand to Will.

Will had been staring at the car, eyes shifting to take in the men who were methodically taking care of the scene. It would be like this never happened by morning. He wasn't sure if he was impressed or disgusted.

Sensing the Ripper's attention, he looked over to see the hand reached out for him. No calluses. No scars. Completely smooth. The hands of someone who sat behind a desk and did paper work for the most part. Handled books, parchment, and pens. Lotioned regularly and taken care of. Not the hands of someone who could slit another's jugular.

Ignoring it, Will pushed himself up, wincing at the pain. Now that the adrenaline had left him, the pain was sharper, almost insistent in having his attention. The bullet wound ached, but it was his knees that hurt the most. It wouldn't keep him from walking, and he had the distinct impression that if Hannibal thought he couldn't walk, he'd handle it himself. Which probably involved Will being carried. Unable to handle that kind of humiliation, he took a moment to steady himself, breathing through the sharp pain. Refusing to look at the doctor, Will headed to the car with slow, measured steps, brushing past him. Hannibal just watched, cataloging every emotion that flickered across Will's face.

Will didn't know where they were going, and didn't bother asking. If Dr. Hannibal Lecter, the Chesapeake Ripper, wanted him to know he would have told him when they'd slid into the Bentley.

The drive wasn't long. They ended up parked in a small lot squeezed between two buildings, hidden from view of the road. Despite being a back alley parking lot, it was clean and well lit. Stepping out of the car, Will noted the cameras mounted on the side of the buildings. Well taken care of and well watched.

Glancing sideways, he watched Hannibal shut his door, straightening his jacket. His hair was fixed again, though not quite like it was before. Simply pushed back, leaving it to the product that was left in his hair to keep it in place. It did the trick for the most part.

Will's own curls still had glass and dirt in it. There would be no fixing it till after a long, hot shower.

"Where are we?"

Will's voice echoed in the mostly empty. No other vehicles had followed them, though a few were already parked. Music thumped, muffled by walls. He knew a club when he heard one, even if he didn't go to them unless Bev and the guys forced him.

Hnanibal looked over at him, watching him as he spun in place, eyes taking everything in. “*Alkis*. My club.”

Alkis. Even if Will didn’t go to clubs that often, he knew of this one. All of Baltimore knew of this one. It was infamous for its class. And for the poker games it held on the upper floor. Only certain clients were invited to attend. They weren’t held regularly and those invited got a black envelope in the mail, the crest of the Ripper Mafia pressed into the gold wax seal.

“You mean the Ripper’s club,” Will corrected, still looking everywhere but at Hannibal. Listening closer, he could hear voices coming from the main street. He didn’t doubt there was a line to get into the club. “Dr. Lecter would be too proper to own such an establishment that would invite such vice and sin.”

A huff of laughter. “I would not desire for my clients to question my ability to help them in their healing.”

Hannibal headed for a door that was tucked at the end of the building. It was darkly colored, easily missed, but shiny. Like it was freshly painted. After a moment of hesitation, Will followed. His knees were stiff, unwilling to bend. Walking irritated his wounds.

“And,” Will added, fingers tightening on his gun when Hannibal reached the door, “who knows what conclusions that might draw on the good doctor if they knew his other occupation was being a club owner.”

Knocking twice, Hannibal’s lips quirked slightly. Barely an upturn at the corners, but said enough. He was more than just amused by Will’s words. Or by the thinly hidden sarcasm and bite.

“Precisely, William. We would not want anyone getting the wrong idea, would we?” he asked, turning to look at Will who was keeping a few steps of distance between them. Not that it would do much good. If Hannibal wanted to hurt him, that amount of distance wouldn’t do anything. Not with the state of his legs.

The door swung open before Will could respond. A large, bald man, dressed in a crisp penguin suit, held it open for them. He looked straight ahead as Hannibal passed him. Will wasn’t even sure if the man was breathing. This was someone who saw nothing and heard nothing, regardless of what he encountered. Well trained. If Will went missing after tonight, he wouldn’t be telling a soul.

“Thank you, Mr. Delly,” Hannibal said, folding his hands behind his back as he walked in. Mr. Delly nodded once, a bare dip of the head. His eyes never looked at Hannibal. They continuously looked dead ahead.

The hallway was well, if dimly, lit. The warm lights ran along the edge of the ceiling on either side. Dark carpet stretched down the hall, matching the color of the ceiling, quieting Hannibal’s footsteps. The walls were off white, floral designs running along it in a lighter tone. It had the impression of being modeled after a theater.

Will hesitated, glancing back to the parking lot. He didn't have to follow. He could turn around and walk back to the main road. Though, without his phone or wallet, it would take a bit to make his way home. Not to mention his knees would slow him down.

Hannibal paused, turning back to him. No expression showed. A blank slate.

Tugging at his earrings, Will took one last look at the lot. There was nothing blocking him. No fences or gates. But, he knew he wouldn't leave. Call it stupidity or curiosity. Puffing out a hard breath, he walked through the door. The door shut behind him with a soft click. He tried not to flinch at the sound.

It felt more permanent than it should.

Looking up to Hannibal, Will caught his expression before he could turn away. Even guarding it, Will could tell he was pleased. Like a cat suddenly laying in the sun that had been covered by clouds.

He hadn't been sure Will would follow.

The tattooist wondered what the Ripper would have done if he had chosen to walk away. Would he have chased, or let him go for a while before bringing him back in?

Up to this point, he'd let him go when he wanted. But up to this point, Will hadn't known of his alter ego either. Letting him go would put Hannibal at risk. Will wasn't sure if Ripper's need to control would allow for that kind of risk. His freedom, his life, would be on the line. That took a lot of trust.

Even if the doctor hadn't shown a strong need to be in control, the Chesapeake Ripper had. There was a reason he had dispatched most of the prominent power figures within the first week of appearing in Baltimore.

Music thudded overhead, telling Will that they were walking under a dance floor. The doorless hallway led to a split, a short staircase going up to another door, and another leading farther down, disappearing as the hallway curved out of sight. Hannibal took the one heading down.

Will refrained mentioning how this was like being led into the depths of hell.

Hannibal would probably find that parallelism agreeable.

Following the steps down, they reached another door. Dark oak with a carving of two stags nose to nose, their antlers intertwining. The door felt out of place, like they weren't walking under a nightclub. They could have been in a whole different dimension for all Will knew.

It opened to reveal another hallway that looked like the one they just left.

Now, Will felt like he was Alice who'd tumbled into the rabbit hole.

Following a few paces behind Hannibal, Will was surprised when a door appeared to the right. Hannibal walked in, leaving the door open for Will to follow. Or not. Not that he had

enough knowledge of the layout to go anywhere other than back. He was sure that this place had been built a little like a maze to keep unwanted individuals from making it too far in before getting caught. It would explain why every hallway looked about the same. If you weren't taught the routes, it would be easy to get turned around and lost.

He'd already come this far. Will stepped through, shutting the door behind him.

This room was different. It was a mixture of comfort and professionalism. Music could still be heard through the ceiling, but it was nothing more than background noise. Easily tuned out. Purple walls, marble floors, an office desk, and a white chair. In the corner directly to his left was a light brown leather couch. It looked buttery soft. Will would probably sink right to his shoulders if he sat in it. It also didn't fit in with the rest of the pieces, even though it looked just as expensive as the rest.

The image of Hannibal sleeping on it, hair mussed and lips slightly parted, drooling, appeared unbidden in Will's mind. He wondered if the older man snored. Glancing over to the man in question, he found him sitting behind the desk, his jacket folded neatly over it. He was rummaging in a drawer, his posture still straight, movements methodical. Completely composed. There was no way he snored. But Will enjoyed the idea.

This room was designed for meetings. To lull the other party into a false sense of security. No chains, locked cages, or blood in sight. All class and comfort. Hannibal no doubt brought them here and used the impression of the room to do the work for him.

Seeing Will standing in front of the door taking in the room, no doubt breaking it down into pieces, Hannibal suppressed a smile. Pulling his med kit out, he set it on the desk before gesturing to the sofa that Will had stared at. "Please. Have a seat. I am sure your legs are hurting you, and I would like to tend them."

A flash of blue as the tattooist gave him an assessing look before they slipped away. Hannibal hoped with time he would be willing to look him in the eyes more often. Especially now that he knew who he really was.

Will limped over to the sofa, face pale from the pain of his wounds. Blood had stained through his pants, to the point of being unsalvageable, if the holes in it hadn't reduced it to such. Hannibal knew that he would try regardless, in the attempt to save himself some money. Or maybe it was to avoid going out and socializing. Much like he had planned with the coat.

Will lowered himself down slowly, wincing, being mindful of the blood on him. Not only was it coating his pants, it was covering his hands. It was crusted on from scraping them on the concrete and trying to stop the bleeding. He probably had some on his face.

Huffing a sigh, he leaned back into the couch, tossing his gun to the side. It would do him no good here.

He'd been correct in his assumption about the couch. It did give under him, though not up to his shoulders. He watched through half-lidded eyes as Hannibal brought his desk chair around and rolled it in front of him, medical kit held in his other hand.

He didn’t so much as twitch when the Ripper took his seat in front of Will, setting the kit at his feet.

He studied the long, artistic fingers that reached for his holes at the knee of his pants, pulling them away to get a better look. They danced along the ruined skin, hardly brushing against it to keep from causing any more pain.

Will closed his eyes, too tired to do much else.

The man was a paradox. A ruthless killer. A mafia boss. Yet he was a psychiatrist. And before that, a doctor. He embodied composure, but delighted in savagery. Almost excessively polite, but didn’t hesitate to slit another's throat. Or mutilate those who he found to be an inconvenience.

He gave Will a headache if he thought about it too long.

He laced his fingers together, locking them to keep from figiditing. He was in for a rough week. Probably a month. The damn stag was already hovering around his peripheral, snorting and pawing the ground, as exhaustion tugged him downward. It would be his companion for the next few days during his nightmares, probably the next few weeks. Not that he could sleep here. Even if the couch was damn comfortable. It was more comfortable than his bed. Guess that was what having money got.

“I will need to cut your pants in order to dress the wounds.”

Hannibal’s voice broke through Will’s dozing, showing him how quickly and how far he’d slipped off. He hadn’t realized how tired he really was. Unconsciousness tugged at him, wanting to pull him down into oblivion. Dangerous.

Cracking his eyes open, he expected Hannibal to be looking at him. Instead, the doctor was going through his kit, pulling out different tools. One looked like oversized, wonky scissors. Long handles, short blades. Built for slicing through fabric efficiently.

“You want to cut up my pants?” Will asked, his words slurring together. Shifting forward, he tried to shake off sleep by rubbing his eyes, forgetting about the blood. “I feel like I should be making a joke about you just wanting to get into my pants.”

Being tired made him loose lipped. And reckless. Alcohol had the same effect. Both were probably not advisable around a mafia boss. One prone to mutilating in the worst kind of ways.

Amusement. That was what the slight tilt of his lips and crinkle around the corner of Hannibal’s eyes told Will. He wasn’t annoyed or displeased.

He was delighted.

Will wasn’t sure how to feel about that.

“If you would rather, you may remove them entirely yourself,” Hannibal offered, going back to pulling tools from the kit. Tweezers, bandages, cleaning wipes appeared in a neat line next

to Will. “However, I felt that option would make you uncomfortable, so I offered to simply cut them where needed.”

An irrational urge to stand and shuck off his pants hit Will. Even if it was just to prove a point. He wanted to see what baffled looked like on the calm doctor when he saw Will’s cotton boxers. They were designed with dogs. Yellow and black labs to be precise.

The Ripper would find it to be atrocious.

Will kept firmly seated as he watched the bottom half of his pants legs be sheared away and folded onto the couch. Careful hands maneuvered his legs, making it easier to remove the material.

Blood had trickled down his calves, gathering along the top of his socks. At least he wouldn’t have to toss them. No one would ever see them, so their state wasn’t a concern. Most of his socks were stained and full of holes anyways. He just hadn’t planned on ruining one of his few perfectly good pairs.

“I am afraid this will sting a bit,” Hannibal warned as he picked up the tweezers, unfolding a piece of cloth on the couch so he could deposit the pieces of glass on it. He needed to remove the bits of glass before he cleaned and bandaged it. “Would you like something for the pain before we start?”

Will shook his head, moving to rest his arms on his thighs so he could watch. If he took any pain meds, he was going to konk right out. He’d rather do that in his own bed.

The tweezer pulled a few pieces free of his skin before Will spoke again.

“When were you going to tell me about your other occupation?”

His tone was light, neither accusing or angry. Simply curious. He was surprised that, for the most part, that was what he felt. Irritation was there in abundance, but no true anger.

“When were you going to put the pieces together, William?” Hannibal countered, not bothering to look up. He meticulously worked, refusing to be distracted, even for this conversation. “Or maybe I should ask when you would allow yourself to see it? With your pure empathy, you could have put it together a while back.”

“Could I? Seems like you didn’t want me to.”

Will ran his fingers gently over the leather between his legs, feeling the softness of it. There were moments that certainly pointed to him being the Ripper, or at least mafia affiliated, but those moments were always followed by counter arguments as to why he couldn’t be. Hannibal worked hard to keep people from figuring out his identity.

The doctor hummed, moving on to Will’s other knee. “I would not think that could stop you if you wished to know.”

“Wouldn’t that be rude, Dr. Lecter?”

Unruffled. Hannibal Lecter was unruffled by this conversation.

Will wished he'd stripped to his dog boxers.

He was also unrepentantly delighted by the fact that Will was pushing back. They were word sparring. And Will felt outmatched. *He* was ruffled and exhausted even if Hannibal wasn't.

"Not if I invited you to," Hannibal murmured, running a thumb over the abused skin. Leaning down, he brushed his lips over where his thumb had just passed. The exhaustion that had been sludging through Will's veins vanished at the heated contact. "Not if I meant you to see me like I see you."

The words were almost lost against his knee.

Will shifted his hands to the edge of the seat, digging his fingers in to keep from moving. His emotions were spinning too fast, even with his mind running in one direction for once. He just wasn't sure if he wanted to deck him for pulling him into something he had fought to avoid his entire life or haul him closer to figure out what exactly was unfolding between them. "And how do you see me?"

Hannibal finally glanced up, his pupils blown wide. There was almost no space between them. This close, Will could see his blood on Hannibal's lips. His gut clenched, fingers spasming. Still. He had to stay still. Hannibal was a predator, even if he was acting docile. Will didn't want to give him a reason to be otherwise.

"You are the mongoose I wish to have under my house when the snakes slither by."

"And what happens when you slither by?"

Hannibal's eyes sparked, showing a smile that flashed teeth. He was still bent over, hands resting on the sides of Will's knees, face hovering just above them. Now he sat up, just a little, so that they were eye level. "Dear Will, whoever said I was a snake?"

Will's eyelash fluttered as his mind whirled, putting pieces together. Pushing up, he leaned back till his back almost hit the couch. Hannibal mirrored the movement. He knew Hannibal as the doctor, but he'd read the news too. He'd seen the photos. He knew the Ripper too.

"You see yourself as above everyone else. Elevated. You're smarter, faster, stronger. You can out maneuver, out think, and out plan anyone. You see others as less than, and when you kill them, you raise them up. Take them from something unworthy to being worthy. To being art."

Hannibal tilted his head to the side, quietly listening to Will's words, making no move to stop or interrupt him. When Will paused, he leaned forward, eyes intent. "What else can you see."

He wasn't asking. Not really. Curiosity burned in him.

Will looked away, down to his knees. What else did he see? Too much. Always too much.

Sensing his retreat, Hannibal grabbed the cleansing wipes. If he pushed too hard, Will was likely to shut down. He had to wait for him.

Will waited till Hannibal started to apply the bandages before speaking again.

“You’re angry.” His voice was low, low enough that the music that could still be heard through the ceiling almost swallowed it. A slight pause in the doctor’s movements told Will he’d heard him. “No, you are beyond angry.”

Hannibal didn’t say anything for a bit. He took his time finishing putting the bandages on Will’s knees. And then looked to the wound on his thigh, where the bullet nicked him. Strong fingers held his thigh still as the Ripper tended to that wound too.

Only once it was also cleaned and taken care of, and only once he was in the middle of returning the tools to the med kit, did Hannibal say, “Do you know what the No Harm’s list is, Will?”

Will paused, running back through his memory before answering. “No.”

Hannibal stood, taking his chair and kit back to his desk. Will stayed where he was, observing the way the muscles in his back shifted under his shirt.

His accent was thicker when he spoke again. “It is a list that was created when the first mafia groups began growing in Baltimore. Essentially, each member is allowed to place only two names on it. Once done, it cannot be undone. Many never place any names on the list. After, no mafia affiliated member is allowed to go near them. They are not to speak, touch, nor harm them in any capacity.”

“A reverse blacklisting.”

“Essentially.”

Hannibal offered no more information, but he didn’t need to.

“You put my name on it.”

It wasn’t a question. Hannibal’s lips pursed, eyes flickering up to meet Will’s before dropping back down to put the kit away. When he was done, he rounded the desk and leaned against the front of it, hands folded together. They looked at one another.

A small huff of air, and then Hannibal said, “Yes.”

The implications weren’t lost on Will. No one was allowed to touch him. Ever. Regardless of what he did or didn’t do. Not even anyone from Hannibal’s group could do anything. Even if he posed a threat. Even if he decided to go to the authorities or the newspapers after this and have the Chesapeake Ripper’s identity revealed.

But someone wasn’t following the rules.

Will must have said that because Hannibal nodded once, eyes sharp. The rage he’d kept hidden while he’d tended to Will was bubbling to the surface, revealing the monster under the skin. Something dark and cunning and savage. Will heard the stag snort by his ear. Something in his own chest stirred in answer to what he saw in Hannibal.

Oh, Hannibal was much more than simply angry with what had happened. He was aggrieved. He'd been provoked.

It was a personal insult. And insulting the Chesapeake Ripper never ended well.

"And who would do such a thing?" Will asked, standing up, ignoring the stinging in his legs. It felt reckless to break the code of conduct for a mafia group. They either thought themselves too clever or too powerful to face the repercussions of their actions.

Hannibal watched him closely as he moved around the room, unable to sit still any longer. "Whoever was after Abigail Hobbs. And whoever Ms. Lounds sold your name to."

Will nodded, eyes catching on the painting behind Hannibal. A white canvas, splattered in blood.

"And you're chasing Freddie to find out who," Will surmised. Freddie would be his best bet in figuring out who was after Will with such intensity. She'd be apt to squeal when caught, since she valued her own skin so highly.

Will paused, eyes turning back to Hannibal. "When was my name put on the list?" He had his suspicion, thinking back to how quickly Hannibal had shown up after he got beat in the alley. "Wait, did you have people following me? Is *Molly* updating you on my whereabouts?"

It made sense to put a spy in his store. He would if the situation were reversed. Easy to know when things went wrong or how to find him. But he could still be pissed about it. He certainly wasn't asked about any of this. Hannibal just did what he always does. Whatever the hell he wants.

Hannibal's eyes hadn't left Will since he'd come to rest against the desk. And he saw the shift in Will. From hunched, scared tattooist, to a predator getting ready to spring. His back straightened, feet braced, eyes flashing.

"I put your name on the list after our first meeting," Hannibal said, completely unashamed. He couldn't help but tense, fingers twitching for his scalpel. An instinctive reaction to a threat, even if that threat was Will. "I do have people following you. And while Molly can update me on you, that is not why I offered her assistance. You needed a secretary and she is well equipped for the job."

Will sputtered, pacing back and forth across the tile, eyes never leaving Hannibal. "The first time? You didn't even know me," he hissed.

Hannibal pushed off the desk, starting to slowly make his way towards Will. "Did I not? I saw you, William. I saw who you really are, when you stop wearing the suit of an ordinary tattooist."

"And do you ever stop wearing the suit of an ordinary psychiatrist?"

"I do not deny who I am, even when I do not show myself to others."

Will halted his pacing, moving instead to circle Hannibal. His hands clenched at his sides, feet padding against the floor. “And I do?”

Hannibal shifted with him so that Will never saw his back. He didn’t look unruffled. He looked interested. Focused. All his attention was solely on Will.

“Do you not?”

Will wanted to snarl at the question. He hated psychiatrists. They could never bother to answer a question directly. Always had to play a game of cat-and-mouse. Or maybe in this case it was snake-and-mongoose, even if Hannibal didn’t see himself as a snake.

He stopped, taking a moment to collect himself. Too many things had happened tonight. He had too much to process and not enough sleep or energy to do so. What should have been a simple date and turned out to be something else entirely. Like finding out the Chesapeake Ripper was trying to court him. Or date him. Or whatever.

Hannibal watched Will retreat into himself, saw the suit he wore for everyone slip back on.

“The real question,” Will said, taking a step back, legs almost bumping into the white chair, “is where does this leave us?”

An eerie stillness settled over Hannibal. “What do you mean?”

“Did you expect me to just accept this? Pretend that this is normal and move on?” Will asked, raising an eyebrow. Normal had never been used to describe him. He hadn’t even had a normal life. He didn’t know why he thought he could have a normal romantic life.

Or if he even wanted one.

But he’d fought for so long to stay out of mafia business. And thanks to one incident, he found himself neck deep in it. It would feel like he just gave up if he just rolled over and ran with this.

“You speak as if you are normal. As if you are ordinary,” Hannibal said, like he’d read Will’s mind. For all Will knew, he could have.

“Maybe I want to be.”

“That would be paramount to self mutilation, trying to force yourself into such mundane trappings, William,” Hannibal murmured, moving closer. Close enough that their toes almost touched and Will had to tilt his head back just a little to look at Hannibal’s face. In the dim lighting, Hannibal’s eyes looked almost black. “Could you let such a beautiful thing go to waste?”

Will wasn’t sure exactly what Hannibal referred to. But it didn’t matter. “It’s my choice.”

He watched as Hannibal’s fingers curled in, like he was fighting to keep from reaching out to touch him.

“And what do you choose? What does Will Graham want? Do you want to be ordinary? Or do you want to be what you were created to be?”

Will looked down, to his scuffed hands. More than just music hummed between them.

What did he choose?

He couldn’t say that he didn’t want Hannibal. The terror at the thought of him getting hurt or worse was still fresh. Even now, knowing what he did, the idea of the doctor being shot or put behind bars made his stomach twist. Made him want to rip and tear and maim if it meant he was safe. Which should be wrong. Hannibal was the Chesapeake Ripper for Chirst’s sake. He shouldn’t want him or what he was offering. It was all wrong.

And he couldn’t say that he didn’t understand what he meant about denying himself. Society had always told him he didn’t fit. That there was something different about him.

Something wrong with him.

It had been drilled into his head that no one would be able to accept him. That he needed to change, to mold himself, into their image in order to be welcomed by anyone. Bev had been his only friend, though even she only saw pieces of him. Others his age had hated him during school. He’d been tormented and beat because he couldn’t figure out how to blend in.

Even his parents hadn’t been able to understand him. His father tried. His mother simply left.

Overtime, he’d been convinced that there was something twisted about him. Something broken. And who could love something broken?

Hannibal said he saw through that. That he saw Will. That he wanted him.

But humans could only see so much. And Will wasn’t sure how much Hannibal could actually see of him. Even though Hannibal was different from society, he was also a different kind of beast from Will. They were similar, but not the same. What if Will choose him, and let him in. And then, what if he truly saw Will, and then rejected him. He was tired of being rejected. He didn’t want to go through that again. In some ways it was better to reject it all now and just walk away.

The idea caused bile to rise in Will’s throat.

No. He couldn’t do that. Not yet.

He curled his fingers into fists, exhaustion returning and rendering him numb. His shoulders slumped forward, hair falling in front of his face. He didn’t know.

“I don’t know.”

He didn’t know, but he was going to find out.

Will walked out of the room. Hannibal didn’t stop him.

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

I really thought they were gonna finally kiss in this chapter. Like, they seriously got thiiiiiiis close. And then Will goes and does his thing again.

Boyo. You don't make it easy on a writer. I JUST WANT YOU TO BE HAPPY DAMMIT.

What Are Friends For?

Chapter Summary

Bev and Will have a heart to heart and then Will and Abel talk work.

Chapter Notes

My friend got me this sticker that says [LOUDLY IMPLIED CANNIBALISM]. It now sits proudly on my computer. For the world to see.

It has proven a unconventional conversation started. That and the looks it gets is pretty hilarious.

But it now how me wondering how long it'll take Will to figure out Hannibal's secret preference of meat?? That's going to prove to be an interesting conversation.

Not beta read

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bev made it two days before demanding to know what happened.

That's how long it'd been since he'd left Hannibal at *Alkis* and Will had remained holed up in the back room, nursing his wounds, refusing to see anyone other than his employees.

The way home had been a bit of a blur. He'd lost his phone and his wallet during the fight. And he'd had no idea how exactly to get back. When the man who'd opened the door when they got there—Mr. Delly if Will remembered correctly—approached, offering to take him home. Hannibal had probably asked him to.

Will had wanted to refuse, but knew it would be a very uncomfortable, long walk back. And he preferred to get home to his dogs quickly than needle Hannibal further. Plus, Will wasn't stupid enough to think that his refusal would have any real affect on the mafia boss. He wouldn't be the one walking home with busted knees and an aching thigh after all.

Will took Mr. Delly up on his offer.

The car ride had been quiet, no music played. It was enough to send Will dozing for most of it.

Since that night, he'd seen neither hide nor hair of the psychiatrist. He hadn't even been able to spot anyone following him, even with him looking for them. He doubted they had gone anywhere. He guessed Hannibal had ordered them to keep a low profile and keep their distance.

One thing that hadn't changed was Molly. She was still bringing him dinner, though she seemed more hesitant to get near him. She'd most likely been informed about what had happened.

But Bev had grown tired of Will hiding.

"You going to tell me what happened?" she asked finally after barging into the office. Her hair was pulled back into a loose bun, her dark leather jacket and dark jeans in contrast to a bright orange shirt and shoes. She had her hands on her hips, head cocked to the side as she watched him riffle through a stack of papers, purposefully not looking up at her.

"No."

How was he supposed to tell her that the man she wanted him to hook up with was also the biggest, most elusive mafia boss in Baltimore. That in his spare time, he hunted down and tortured people, before spreading them out like like art for the world to see. Not that she wouldn't be smug about it, if equally horrified. She'd equally brag about his ability to bag big cats while also being constantly worried about his safety.

But her knowing Hannibal's alter ego would end in her death. The man's survival instincts would push for it. Will wasn't sure about even his own fate. It was a miracle he'd been able to walk out of the club unhindered. But Will didn't know if he could ever forgive him if he took one of the few people Will deeply cared about.

That was as good as closing a door and nailing it shut. And then burning to ash.

He wasn't ready for that yet.

Approaching the desk, Bev leaned her hip against it, looking him over.

Her dark eyes darted over him, cataloging everything. Small scrapes on his face told her of a fight, but it was the way he walked that told her his injuries were more extensive, and that it was more than just a fight. A slight limp and wince when he sat or stood. Whatever he wasn't saying was more serious than he wanted her to know.

"Did you fight with him?" she asked, though the idea was baffling. Even if Will was a scrappy fighter, she had a hard time seeing the doctor getting into a fist fight. It just didn't jive with his combed back hair and three piece suits. Not to mention the calm demeanor. Yet here her friend was, looking and moving like he was fresh from a fright. When he should have looked fresh from a date. "It looks like you did."

Will glared up at her, standing from his desk and moving to his filing cabinet, papers in hand. "We didn't have a fist fight Bev. We aren't in grade school."

“I don’t think age has ever stopped you before.”

“Now you’re just being rude,” Will almost growled as he yanked the drawer open and shoved the papers in, not taking the time to make sure they actually ended up in the section they were supposed to go. He would regret that later when he needed to find them again, but for now he couldn’t bring himself to care. He was feeling prickly and irritated. Enough to want to shoot something.

Bev snorted, shifting to keep facing him, hands shoved in the pockets of her jacket. “But still truthful. Remember when you laid Francis out?”

“That was in high school.”

“Which isn’t grade school.”

“He had it coming.”

“I don’t think that was ever up for debate,” Bev said, grinning. Not a devilish grin. More imp-like in nature. “You just beat me to it.”

Will slammed the drawer shut, eyes flitting closed. Even with all the years that passed, his anger still seethed whenever he thought of Francis. And pride. Both ugly feelings that left him feeling that he needed a hot shower.

Francis had been a boy a grade ahead of them. A classical bully if ever there was one. But his family was also wealthy enough to get him out of most troubles. Neither Will nor Bev took to bullies well. It was just that this particular bully took it too far one day.

Will got suspended for the rest of the semester. Francis ended up in the hospital for about the same amount of time. The nightmare stag didn’t leave his dreams once until Francis was released.

“So,” Bev said, dragging the word out as Will sighed, eyes settling on the ship painting, “why did you and the good doctor fight?”

“We didn’t f—”

“You didn’t fistfight,” Bev cut him off, getting a twitch out of her friend. Looking at the painting all day wasn’t going to make her go away any faster. “But, considering you were in your office at an ungodly hour the morning after the date, rather than having a good romp in I’m sure a very expensive bed, it’s pretty clear you fought.” She raised an eyebrow, lips quirked up. She knew he was avoiding looking at her. Even though she didn’t hold a candle to his ability, she could still read him well. Better than most. And right now, it was clear he didn’t want to be read. “And we can talk about who you actually fought later, since you can’t seem to stay out of trouble.”

It wasn’t like he went out looking for trouble. It just found him.

Though saving Abigail was probably considered sticking his nose into trouble.

Will huffed a sigh, tugging on his earrings. There wasn't anything to be done about it now, and he'd do it all over again. Even if it meant dealing with Hannibal Lecter, the fucking Chesepeake Ripper. Will turned away from the painting, taking his seat again.

He knew Bev wasn't going to let this go. Even if he did manage to get her out of his office for the time being, she'd be back and ready to have this conversation all over again later. Sometimes the best course of action was to give her just enough to leave the rest alone.

"We just had a difference in philosophies," Will said, leaning back in his chair.

It was a gross understatement for what had happened between them. But, it also perfectly described what had happened.

Bev sat in the one across from him. Her legs pulled up so she could criss-cross them, hands gripping her ankles. "Difference in philosophies? What, you couldn't stand the suits anymore? He doesn't agree with tattoos?"

"More like we disagreed on our worldview."

"So a difference in opinions."

Will winced. Yes, but it went deeper than that. But he didn't know how to describe it without giving more away than safe. It was more than just a preference in what was better to eat or what should be worn. Hannibal liked to play god. He was judge and executioner. More than opinion, it was the foundational thinking that differed.

Sitting forward, he leaned his arms against the desk, letting the edge dig into his forearms. "Bev, sometimes people just don't fit. It doesn't have anything else to do with it. They can be the same in personality, or have the same ideology, but that doesn't mean it works. And that's what it feels like for me and Hannibal. There's not specifically wrong," lie, there was something very, very specifically wrong, "it's just that we don't work as well as I thought we would."

"Bullshit."

Bev's word cut through the room, surprisingly angry. Will blinked at her, surprised by the change of emotion.

Bev leaned forward, hands gripping her legs so tightly her knuckles were white. Like she was forcefully keeping herself from getting up. Considering what he could read from it, that was probably exactly what was going on. "That's bullshit and you know it. I don't know what happened, or where my car is for that matter, but we both know all that was complete shit."

Will hid his flinch by looking to his feet, where Winston typically was.

Right. The Civic.

He still hadn't told her about her car. Mostly because that meant explaining everything else. Not that he could get out of it forever. He'd have to tell her eventually, but he was also content to put it off as long as possible. If she didn't strangle him for getting into more

danger, she would for the fate of her car. She loved that thing. Had babied it since she'd gotten it.

"What's really going on Will?" Bev asked, trying to get a read on him. But he titled his head down, letting his hair act as a barrier for him. "Does he have some weird kink or something? What's the real reason you're sitting here rather than asking Dr. Lecter out to lunch?"

"You mean, other than I'm flat broke?"

Bev's hard look told him he wasn't going to divert the conversation.

Will remained silent, refusing to look at her. "It's clear he likes you, and you obviously like him, so what's the problem?"

"Who said he liked me?" The question was spoken to the floor.

Bev snorted, shaking her head. Will was unbelievable sometimes. Or, maybe a stubborn ass. "Did you miss it when he came down to fix you up?" she asked, and then seeing the rebuttal coming, added, "Or the fact he's repeatedly asked you out? That man has been trying to get you over to his house for weeks. You don't ask people into your home if you don't like them."

Will fiddled with the papers on his desk. "Maybe he's just interested in getting into my head. He is a psychiatrist."

"If that was the case, you wouldn't be interested in him. You'd see through that shit in a minute."

It had happened before. Others had come around pretending to be interested in Will, when all they really wanted was to get a better look at how his brain worked. Bev had seen her friend tear into them and leave them in pieces in a matter of moments. His gift wouldn't let him not see it. And his past wouldn't let him associate with someone who just wanted to use him to study him, let alone fall for them.

Will finally glanced up at her, face unreadable. "I never said I was interested in him."

"Except you took him out on a date. *You* did." That got her a nose wrinkle. "And you hate dates. Trying to get you to go on a date is like trying to rock a chair in a room full of long tailed cats. You're libel to get scratched and bit trying. And then the cat's just angry the entire time."

Bev had tried a number of times to get him to go on blind dates, and that's exactly what had happened. Most of the time, Will purposefully set out to ruin it within the first ten minutes. If Bev managed to get him to go at all. Granted, most of them wouldn't have worked out anyway, but the man went so far as to try and sabotage them himself.

Rubbing the back of his neck, Will puffed out a breath. He didn't have anything to refute that. Even if he hadn't said it outloud, his actions had. And Bev had seen that.

"He says he sees me." Or sees some version of him.

The blank look on Bev's face told him she hadn't been expecting that. "And?"

"And he wants me to be myself."

" *And?* "

She couldn't understand why that had sent Will into hiding. Because that's what he'd been doing the past two days. Hiding.

"He wants me to be *myself."*

And then she understood. "Oh, Will."

Bev fell back, slumping into her seat, as she really looked at him. She rubbed her thigh, where her own wolf tattoo was hidden under her jeans. It took up most of her upper right thigh, one of the largest pieces she had. The next was the violin Will had tattooed to the inside of her upper arm.

With the exception of those who were in *Wolf Trap,* Will didn't have anyone. No one he ran to when he was in trouble. She was there, but he always said he was fine. In their group, he would take care of them if they needed it, but he didn't let them help him most of the time. He kept to himself. He rarely allowed himself to relax enough to be himself.

That took a bottle of whiskey and an entire pizza before she saw that side of him. And even then, it was muted. Price and Zeller helped bring it out too. Their duo idiocy helped to loosen him up some.

And if she was honest, Will scared her. Not in the sense that *he* scared her, but more that she was scared *for* him. While they never spoke directly about it, she knew how dark his mind could go. And she was scared that one day he'd go too far and wouldn't come back.

She was afraid that one day she would lose her friend to whatever lurked in him.

And now there was someone who wanted him to be himself. Who was promising to remain with him in a way Bev couldn't. To help him back when his mind took him to dark places. To be there when he came back busted and bruised, anger and something darker simmering off him.

"And what do you want?"

It was the question he had been asking himself for the past two days.

He'd had his answer since he walked out of Hannibal's office.

"What if," Will started slowly, looking up to Bev, "I decide I want this, and I'm not who he wants me to be? What if I'm not enough as myself?"

Because out of everything, that was probably what he feared most. He'd tried to be normal for so long, he wasn't sure who he really was anymore. And what if who he really is isn't

what Hannibal was hoping for? He's the fucking Chesapeake Ripper. He had expectations of who Will would be when he stopped trying to blend in.

What happened if Will didn't turn out how Hannibal thought he would?

Bev didn't say anything for a long time. Molly's voice echoed in the room as she answered a call. And then Price and Zeller's voice followed, arguing over the correct way to say caramel. They'd been fighting about that for the past five days. Thanks to that, now Will knew the Latin root for it and the approximate time that the word was coined.

And then Bev unfolded herself, leaving her chair to come around and sit on the desk next to Will. She didn't reach out to touch him, but shifted so that her leg pressed against his. The one that had the wolf tattoo on it. A silent reminder that she was there with him, no matter what.

"If you decide to let him go," Bev said, voice soft, thoughtful, "would you be okay with that?"

No.

The denial rang through Will, almost jarring his bones at the intensity.

Bev read his answer in the silence. In the way his hands balled into fists.

"But I don't want to go any further without knowing he can accept me," Will said, looking up to Bev, eyes reaching hers. He needed to know that Hannibal could accept him as he was. Even if it meant not living up to how he had Will in his head.

He needed to know how far he could go. He needed to know who he was after everything else was shed. Niceties, expectations, habits. A plan unfolded in his mind, like an intricate origami piece coming undone to see the blueprint. It breathed to life, taking shape and filling out as his thoughts pulled pieces together.

Hoofs were tapping as they came up behind him. The stag breathed on the back of his neck.

Freddie-fucking-Lounds was at the center of the plan.

Bev sat back, crossing her arms. She knew he was cooking up something. Will was meeting her gaze. "What do you need?"

A knock sounded, breaking the tension that had steadily built between them, before Molly popped her head in, face apologetic. Even without knowing what they had been talking about, she could tell it had been serious.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but a Mr. Gideon is here wondering if you're taking walk-ins Will," she said, leaning her head against the edge of the door. Her hair hung loose around her face, bangs sliding with the movement of her head.

Will's brows shoot up in surprise. He looked at Bev and she nodded. They would return to his conversation later. "He usually books appointments."

“He seems pretty distressed about something.” Molly chewed her lip, like she wanted to say more. “And he has blood on him.”

Bev and Will shared a look, before Will turned back to Molly. “Go ahead and show him back to my room then. Did he say anything else?”

“Just something about wanting a broken mirror or something this time.”

Bev leaned in after Molly left to help Abel, her expression tight. “Do you want someone in there with you?”

Abel always came off two steps away from crazy. It seemed he finally took those last two steps too, but he’d never said or done anything during a session to warrant Will throwing him out or asking him not to return. And the walls were thin for a reason.

“No, I got this.”

Leaving his office, he went into this work room. The room was a dark blue, with dog pictures hung up on the walls, one for each stray he’d ever had, and a large mirror sitting by the door.

He found Abel already laying in the chair, staring up at the ceiling unblinking. He was wearing khakis with a pale blue button up. Both were dotted with blood. Will noted that the smell of iron and death lingered around Abel as he took his seat next to him.

“Hello, Mr. Graham.”

Regardless to how many times Will had insisted otherwise, Abel never called him anything but that.

“Abel.”

Abel didn’t turn to look at him. He just stared up, his thoughts a million miles away. His voice was gruff, a little scratchy, like he’d been screaming or crying at one point. Now his skin was sunken in, color a little paler than normal. It was as if the life had been sucked out of him.

Will fiddled with his tools and then pulled out a journal and pencil from under his station. He’d need to do an initial sketch first. If this ended up being more complicated, he’d have to schedule Abel to come back later in the week. “Molly said you wanted a broken mirror. Did you have anything specific in mind?”

“No,” Abel said after a short pause, hands reaching up to fold across his stomach. His knuckles were a mirage of purple, black, and red. Will pretended not to notice the blood that was embedded under his nails or the fact that one of his fingers looked broken. “A broken mirror will suffice.”

“Where are you thinking? What size?” Will asked, beginning to sketch out some rough ideas, ignoring the smell of gunpowder and blood. He could do an antique hand mirror, though that might be more feminine than Abel wanted. He could also just do an oval mirror. Maybe just mirror shards?

“On the back of my hands. The entire back.”

Will paused, looking again to the hands. The name of his wife was tattooed on the side of his ring finger on his left hand. He’d talked about the fight he and his wife had last time he’d come in to work on his back piece. It was over what to name their kids when they had them.

Now Abel was massaging the name of his wife, like the tattoo hurt.

Will stilled as he pieced together what had happened. Abel’s wife was gone. Dead, going off the blood. Questions bubbled in the back of Will’s throat, but he swallowed them. He had a no questions policy for a reason.

And it felt like he’d be poking a bear if he asked about it.

“Do you have a preference in—”

“She’s gone.”

Abel’s words were soft, warbling. Like his body didn’t, almost couldn’t, allow him to say it. Acknowledge it. The scratching of Will’s pencil filled the space between them.

“She’s gone, and it’s my fault.” Abel’s fingers rubbed harder against the tattoo on his finger. Will wasn’t sure if he wanted to ensure it was forever pressed into his skin, or if he was trying to rub it out. The rubbing paused. “Well, not completely my fault. There is one other responsible, but I’m afraid they are proving,” he hesitated, like he wasn’t sure what word he wanted, “elusive. I suppose that’s what money and influence can get you.”

Will understood that. Many of the rich got away with things because they could buy their way out of it.

“Mr. Graham, have you ever wanted to find a person responsible for your pain? And had no idea where to look?”

Will paused his drawing, eyes never leaving the sketch. “Yes.”

“Did you ever find them?”

Questions. He should shut this down. It was dangerous to ask or answer questions. Especially when one of them was a mafia member. He’d had a good reason for installing that rule in the beginning. Knowing too much or asking too much always puts you on the wrong side of someone. Though, it was clear that he already was on the wrong side of someone for saving Abigail. That, and he had the undivided attention of the Chesapeake Ripper. It was hard to think of anything worse happening.

“Not yet.”

Freddie was still out there, causing trouble. And he needed to find her.

Abel’s eyes slid to Will, noting the clenched jaw.

Before the man could make a remark about it, Will went back to sketching, asking, “Do you think you’ll ever find yours?”

Abel let out a humorless laugh, teeth brilliant white as they appeared briefly. “Why of course, Mr. Graham. Finding people is what I do for a living. Or things. People are always losing something and they are more than willing to pay whatever to get it back. It’s just a matter of when, rather than if. He can’t hide from me forever. He’s too much of a pest to lie low for too long. Likes the light too much for that.”

The way he said it told Will that they didn’t just lose something. It was a theft, a kidnapping, a debt. He was sure that Abel had a hand in the misplacement in the person or object most of the time. Or at least knew the person who was responsible. That didn’t mean people would pay him any less to get their items or person back.

Will pitied whoever Abel had his sight on. Even if they were responsible for the death of his wife, very few deserved the punishment that the mafia member would inflict.

Finishing the sketch, Will turned his journal to Abel, getting his approval before he started sketching it on the transfer paper. Two ornate frames, with shattered glass within each. One with a fractured skull and the other with a fractured face.

Abel nodded once, like Will knew he would. It would hurt like a bitch, but Abel had never shied away because of that before. His knee tattoos were proof of that.

Will pulled out the transfer paper.

“What will I owe you for this?” Abel asked as he watched Will bend over the paper, eyes watching the steady movement of the tattooist's hands.

Will paused, looking up to the mirror in the room. His curls stuck up all over the place, thanks to the fact he’d spent most of the time bent over paperwork, one hand constantly running through his hair. His white tee was stained, and worn. A size too big for him, so it almost swallowed his frame. Looking at himself, something calculating slid across his reflection. His blue eyes shifted to a deeper grey, lips tilting at one corner. Twisting, he regarded the man in his chair.

“Actually, instead of money, I need a favor.”

Abel's eyes darkened. He pushed up from the seat, swinging his legs over the side to brace his elbows on his knees. A small smile twisting his lips. There was something fractured in that expression. “Oh. Pray tell, what does Mr. Graham need from little bitty ol’ me?”

Will met those eyes, letting some of his own darkness leak out.

“I need you to find someone for me.”

“Of course. Who would you like me to find?”

“Freddie Lounds.”

Abel would already know her from when she worked at his shop. Will saw the recognition spark in his eyes. Abel's grin turned feral.

"Shouldn't be a problem. What are friends for after all?"

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

sings some~ones gon~na geeeet it~ do-do-do

cackles tis gonna be good.

But this probably wasn't the friend you were expecting, was it?

Mums

Chapter Summary

The gang goes out for their Friday night out.

Chapter Notes

Heyo. I'm back!

Definitely didn't mean to take such a long break. I apologize profusely for it!

Anyway, I hope you enjoy this chapter! I feel like things are finally beginning to pick up.

Not beta read

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What inspired this sudden change of venue?”

Smoke curled heavy in the dive bar *Mums* , obscuring faces of those at the side tables around them. The TV that hung in the corner of the room above the bar had the volume turned a few notches too high for those watching the baseball game. It looked to be the Orioles against the Washington Nationals. The place was packed as people piled in to watch the game. Paired with the jukebox and loud patrons who weren’t interested in the game, it made it hard to hear yourself think at times.

Bev, who sat next to Will, her hip pressed against his, was onto her second glass of beer. Her hair was hauled up into a ponytail, but a few strands stuck to the side of her neck as the heat of the room swelled around them. Her eyes ran over the people around them, but mostly she was zeroed in on the single pool table in the room over. She had a deep love for the game. Or, more accurately, she had a deep love for wiping the felt with Zeller and Price.

Those two had migrated towards the bar to order, but judging by their postures, they looked to have gotten into another argument. They were leaning against the bar, squished between two other men, legs crossed and heads bouncing around as they talked. The Christmas lights that hung behind the bar painted them in reds and blues. They’d likely completely forgotten to order. If Will was a betting man, he’d say they were arguing over the potential winner of the game, like everyone else in the bar.

“Will? Did you hear me?”

Will hummed, lifting his own glass so that his bourbon caught in the colorful lights, his eyes sliding over to Alana Bloom. She watched him closely, her glass of beer pressed to her bottom lip, but not drinking it.

She was still in her professional wear having come straight to the bar after getting off work. Her rich dark hair pulled back into a french twist, lips painted a deep red and eyes lined lightly with kohl. Her buttoned shirt was tucked into navy sailor pants that matched the blazer she had thrown over the back of her high chair. Overall, she looked out of place in this kind of establishment.

One of the boys had called her to let her know about their new location for Friday night out. And apparently had told her that Will had picked it.

Seeing his questioning quirk of an eyebrow, Alana wrinkled her nose at him good naturedly. She was always friendly, even if she tended to keep some distance between them. When she’d done that while working for him, it had bothered him. It made him wonder if he was crossing some sort of professional line by trying to be friendly. Or if he was making her feel uncomfortable.

Now that she was working to become a psychiatrist, he was grateful for it.

“I asked why you wanted to come here? Most of the time you don’t even want to come at all, but Bev makes you.”

It was true. Usually he was only here because Bev wouldn’t give him a choice otherwise. But she didn’t need to know why he’d suddenly had a change in heart. “Had a client recommend it,” Will said, pulling at an earring. It was true. But it had also been recommended a few months ago by an out-of-towner. Tourists didn’t always give good advice. Usually too busy riding the high of vacation to see things from the point of view of someone who lived there.

Alana’s expression told him she didn’t buy it, but tactfully didn’t say that. “Well, this place doesn’t have as many pool tables.” She took another glance around the place. “I doubt we’ll get to play many games, if any at all. This place is completely packed.”

“It’s the game,” Bev said flatly, her eyes now on the TV. Even if Will didn’t pay close attention to sports, he could tell this was a big game. The tension in the room was about as thick as the smoke. That and there were times the room erupted in either cheers or yelling.

Will turned his attention back to the front door, leg bouncing as he waited.

Abel had come through with his end of the deal that morning. A large, white envelope had been taped to the shop’s door when he’d arrived to start getting things ready for opening. Nothing had been written on it and there were no markings on it. It was something that could have been bought at any convenience store.

It was how he knew it hadn’t come from Hannibal before he’d pulled it down, even when it had his style written all over it.

The man, while being many things, was not common.

Will took a long drink from his glass, letting the oaky sensations of it fill his mouth, as he tried not to think of Hannibal.

They hadn't spoken since Will had left him at *Alkis*. He didn't know if Hannibal was waiting for him to make the next move, or if the mafia boss was contemplating washing his hands of the tattooist. The latter seemed unlikely now that Will knew his identity, but Hannibal had a habit of doing things that went against what he expected. Like Bev's car.

She thanked him a few days ago for finally returning her car.

"I was beginning to wonder if I'd ever get it back," she joked, swinging her keys around her finger as leaned against his office door. She found it parked in the garage of her gated apartment complex, the keys sitting in the driver's seat. The fact she wasn't ripping into him meant that the Civic didn't look like it had suffered a shoot out.

Then, the next day Will walked into his office after a shift at *Royale* to find his phone and wallet waiting for him on his desk . But no gun. He must have left it at *Alkis* when he sat on the couch. He didn't even remember putting it down, though he knew he had it when he got out of the car to follow Hannibal into the club. It seemed that the mafia boss didn't have an interest in returning that particular item. He didn't like not having it. He felt exposed, especially with the multiple attempts on his well being recently.

There wasn't a note or message left with either. Both looked untouched. In fact, the phone looked brand new, all the previous cracks in the screen gone. When he turned it on, he found all his information there, and no missed phone call from Hannibal.

Will might not have given him his number, but he knew if the doctor really wanted it, he'd find it.

It felt like the man was beginning to cut away any reasons for them to run into each other again.

Something like anxiety had his gut clenching at the thought.

"And I thought you wouldn't be able to make it today."

Bev's words were sharp, even as they were emotionless, pulling Will back to the present. While the two women had never been super friendly with one another, their relationship had entered a cold front after Alana had both left and rejected Will.

Alana shrugged, head tilting, exposing her slender neck. Her hands folded around her glass. "Change of plans. The person I was supposed to meet had something come up last minute. So, I figured why not? It's been a while since I was last able to come to one of your Friday nights out."

Running his fingers over the top of his glass, Will set it down, watching Bev's jaw flex. The sleeve of her black t-shirt shifted to expose the violin tattoo on her toned arm as she took a

long swig from her glass. He could practically hear her swallowing whatever words were sitting on her tongue.

Will looked back to the door. There was no guarantee anything would happen tonight, but he had a feeling. He just needed to be patient.

Another roar tore through the room from the people watching the game covering Bev's muttering into her drink something along the lines of second options and shoving things where the sun doesn't reach. Snorting, Will leaned back in his seat, knocking his knee against Bev's as a reminder to behave.

"Got stood up by your date?" Zeller suddenly asked, popping in out of nowhere, seltzer in hand. He'd heard just the last piece of the conversation. His words weren't a jab. More like tactless curiosity.

Alana's eyes were cold as she looked him over, lips pressing into a hard line. She wasn't as forgiving of his quirks as Will and Bev were. "It wasn't a date. I was planning to meet with a mentor. He's renowned in the field of psychiatry. Being able to talk with him is an honor."

"Sounds like a meeting that you hoped would turn into a date," Price said as he scooted in right next to Zeller, drinkless, eyes still on the game. Both men had a habit of being rather blunt. "I didn't think people like you got stood up. I mean Brian and Will make sense, but they're weird."

Will and Bev shared a look of amusement. For all of Alana's friendliness and professional politeness, she'd always struggled with Zeller and Price.

It took a moment for Will to realize that the idea of Alana not showing up, or even pursuing someone didn't bother him. Twisting to look at the door, his leg bounced against the footrest on the chair. Before, it would cause pinpricks of pain in his heart, and a sense of rejection he couldn't seem to squash. Now, all that he could find was shallow curiosity and pity.

"Not that Will has had *that* problem recently."

Everyone, including Will, turned to stare at Bev as she sang those words. A hard flush that had nothing to do with the heat in the room was beginning to creep up his throat. He really did not want to have this conversation around Alana, whether he had feelings for her or not. Price and Zeller grinned at one another and Alana sat up, eyes darting between Bev and Will.

"If anything, it's been the other way around, poor man," she went on, saying the words into her drink, eyes alight with mischievousness. Will glared at her cheekbone. "I keep telling Will to go easy on him. After all, he's head over heels for our dear boss."

"Enough Bev," Will said, turning back to the door. There was no way he was having this conversation.

She laughed, setting her glass down to cross her arms. "Don't think I haven't seen you checking your phone every five minutes." Everyone looked at his phone that sat on the small table. "And I know you aren't that eager to hear from Jack."

In truth, he was actually hoping to get an email from Abel.

Not that he could admit that either. Will sighed, tugging on his earrings. “I told you that things weren’t working out between us.”

“And I called bullshit, if you recall.”

Their conversation hung between them. Bev knew why he was really running and she wasn’t pulling any punches.

“Who are you talking about?” Alana cut in before Will could form a retort. She hadn’t come to one of their Friday’s out since the whole Abigail incident.

“No one.” Will’s tone told everyone that he wasn’t interested in talking about it. Price and Zeller thought they’d had some falling out and weren’t keen on poking at a sore spot. Bev, who had a little more information with what was going on, wasn’t interested in sharing that with Alana. “It doesn’t matter any more.” At least for now.

Alana, the most diplomatic of the group, changed the topic sensing the frostiness in Will’s words. “Well then, you want to tell me what happened to your face?” she asked, gesturing to his eye.

Blinking, Will reached up, running his fingers over his face before remembering the gash on his brow from when he’d gotten attacked in the alley. It’d been long enough that it was practically healed, and the rest of the bruises from the incident were faded, but he had a decent gap in his brow now. And the scarring was still a harsh pink. The dim lighting in *Mums* helped keep people from noticing it.

He forgot about it most of the time. His attention tended to focus on the light fingerprints on his throat or the gashes on his knees. He’d gotten lucky with his neck. If the woman had held on any longer, he’d have some serious explaining to do with Bev.

Though, knowing her track record, she’d assume it was a kink.

Will wasn’t sure which would be worse. The truth or the assumption.

And he couldn’t not think of Hannibal whenever he looked at his knees. He’d tossed the pants when he got back to his apartment. He wasn’t interested in wearing handmade khaki shorts. But the trashmen hadn’t come by yet so he was forced to see them every time he went to throw something away.

Bev waved Alana’s concern off when she realized that Will’s train of thought had disappeared. “Dog bath incident.” Price and Zeller glanced at one another but didn’t call her out. “It’s what he gets for habitually picking up strays.”

Will huffed a soft laugh, relaxing into his seat. It had happened before. “Says the one who sat on her ass and drank my alcohol rather than helping. Like you said you were there for.”

“Not my dogs, not my problem.”

“Like you wouldn’t take them if you could,” Price said, finally turning away from the TV.

“Good thing my apartment has a no pets policy.”

“And she’s more of a cat person,” Zeller pointed out, head turned toward the pool table. The group there had been there for over an hour. They’d probably be quitting before long.

Bev narrowed her eyes at him. “That an Asian joke?”

“I think,” Will stepped in before Zeller or Price could bury themselves any further, “he’s referring to the fact that you have a bedazzled leather jacket that has a cat and the words ‘Cats Rule’ on it. And are constantly showing us cat videos. *And* ,” Will went on when she opened her mouth to argue, “you have the list of names you plan to give your cats, when you can finally get one, taped to your station so you can ask clients which names they think are best.”

Bev stared down each of them in turn cooly, before she beamed, flashing her dimples. “It’s between Sir Bingus Croosby and Their Majesty Beezow Bowman if anyone is interested. Now, move over,” she said, jabbing Zeller with a finger so he’d let her by, “I’m going for another beer.”

Price wrinkled his nose, shaking his head as Bev pushed her way through the crowd. “The drinks have gotten too expensive for my taste. Maestro and Dynasty need to figure their shit out. I don’t know how much longer I can take from these inflated prices.”

“You’re just a cheapskate,” Zeller pointed out.

“That’s cute coming from the one drinking a *seltzer.* ”

“What’s wrong with a seltzer?”

“Not very manly is it?”

Zeller took on the air of superiority, pausing to take an exaggerated swallow of his drink. “I disagree. I think it shows I’m manly enough not to be bothered by such *shallow* thinking.”

“Maybe,” Price hedged. “But, you’ll never be manlier than someone drinking hard liquor. I mean, what’s manlier? A fruity drink or a drink that burns your nose and throat?”

“Fruity.”

Bev slid back into her seat, beer in hand, looking a little haggard from having to push through so many people. “What I’d miss?”

“Whether a fruity drink or hard liquor is manlier,” Will sighed, finishing off the remains of his drink.

Bev perked up at his words. Crossing her legs, she pressed her cold beer to the side of her face, trying to cool the flushed skin. Will couldn’t imagine how hot she was wearing all

black. “You’re both wrong. It’s beer. Nothing says prowess and machoness like shotgunning a beer in ten seconds.”

Alana didn’t laugh, like she might have once. Instead, she fiddled with her nails, pinching at the cuticles as she watched all of them interact. In the past, she would jump in, using some sort of logic to settle the dispute before it really got going. Now, she sat and watched as though she was an observer.

Will ran an eye over her quickly, and then to the rest of his group. Her clothing and mannerism not only put her at odds with *Mums*. It was also another way to create a divide between her and them. Will in his tattered jeans and plaid unbuttoned shirt thrown over a white tee, Zeller in khakis and a shirt that said ‘made in baltimore,’ and then Price with his dark wash jeans and striped shirt. None of them looked like people she would be around with any regularity. She looked like she should be hosting a dinner party at some lavish restaurant, rather than swinging it low with them.

Will’s fingers ran over the rim of his glass, lips pursed in thought. How long till she stopped showing for Friday’s all together? She always talked of making something of herself. Will just hadn’t realized that she meant leaving the rest of them behind for it.

Maybe tattooists and piercers just didn’t fit into the lives of doctors.

A roar from those watching the games momentarily disrupted the argument, and his phone lighting up interrupted his thoughts.

Sitting forward, he snatched it before Bev had the chance to.

“Ohh,” Bev sang, leaning against his shoulder to try and get a peak at his screen. “Who could that possibly be?”

Will titled his phone away from her, eyebrows pulling together. Sighing, he shoved it in his pocket and slid out of his seat. “Actually, it’s from Jack. He had someone call out last minute. He needs me to cover.”

They all wore varying expressions of disbelief.

“What? It’s like eleven. Won’t they be closing soon anyways? And he knows this is our night.”

“Yeah, tell him you have plans,” both Zeller and Price said at the same time. The couple occupying the table next over turned to stare at them.

“Will,” Alana called, leaning across the table to try and catch his attention. Her voice was soft, eyes wide and pleading. He paused, staring at the spot around her shoulder. “You know he can’t actually force you to come in. It’s rude he’s even asking you now. Why don’t you just tell him you can’t tonight? You deserve a break.”

Will shrugged, pushing his chair in, not looking at any of them. He gave a sheepish grin, pulling at his earrings. “The diner doesn’t close till three. and with prices rising, I need the

extra money. You know how much it costs to feed my dogs."

"The furry family strikes again," Bev muttered into her drink, expression dark. She didn't want to be stuck with Alana.

"Well be careful then. A lot of people have been going missing recently."

Alana's words made Will pause. They were in a city that was the birthplace of some of the biggest mafia bosses in history. People went missing or wound up dead all the time. "What do you mean?"

"A bunch of young girls have disappeared," Alana said, head pulling to one side. "Haven't you guys heard about it around the shop? It's been what anyone can talk about at the university for the past week and a half."

Panic, sick and slow, slid through him. Abigail. It had to be connected to her. Why else would little girls suddenly up and start going missing? It was too much of a coincidence.

But before his panic could morph into something uglier, Bev said, "And on Twitter." She waved her phone at the rest of them. "But they caught the guy responsible a few days ago. He was hauled up in one of those condemned apartment buildings. And even if he wasn't, Will doesn't really fit what he'd be looking for."

Letting out a soft sigh of relief, Will said his goodbyes and shouldered his way out of the bar.

The night air felt refreshing against his fevered flesh. As hot as it still was even at night during the summer, it was cooler than a jampacked bar that's air conditioner seemed to have busted at some point. Sweat trickled down his back, gathering at the top of his jeans. Looking around, he watched as people walked up and down the street. Some gathered near the red brick buildings, clustering together to smoke. The trees that dotted the sidewalk were beginning to lose the green in their leaves due to the repressive heat.

Pulling out his phone again, Will checked the information Abel sent him one more time. With Alana there, he hadn't been able to tell them the truth. Though, he might have lied even if she hadn't been. Bev either would have wanted to stop him or come with him, and neither was an option. They both meant she'd know more than was good for her. Or it meant she would start poking her nose into areas that could get her killed. He would be too focused on her to really concentrate on the things that mattered. It would cost him.

He couldn't afford to make any mistakes.

Stepping out of the way of a gaggle of women, he shoved his phone back into his pocket and headed down the sidewalk, disappearing into the shadows.

Walking up out of the basement of *Mums,* small purse heavy with cash, Freddie Lounds lit a cigarette and took a moment to soak in the heat. Looking away at the deserted back alley, she

hummed to the music coming out of one of the windows. Even outside, she could faintly make out the sounds of a sports game being played on TV.

She loved summer.

Not because of the typical reasons one liked the summer, like beach vacations or no school. But because everything seemed to reach a boiling point when temperatures ran high. So many secrets and scandals tended to fall into her lap when the heat pushed people to be reckless. It made them feel alive and untouchable. Like summer and youth would never end.

Perfect for the picking.

Will Graham was proof of that. He was always beating her upside the head with keeping her nose out of others business, and how curiosity was known for killing the cat. It was like getting a bad pep talk from a father who was never around. And now, for such a careful man, he really had gone and done something stupid. Landed himself in hot water with all the wrong type of people.

Moving to stand against the back wall of the bar, she took a long drag of her cigarette. It was dark on this side of the building. Not as many lights out, and a few of them were out. It was safer that way. No one would be able to easily recognize her. Even wearing a cap pulled low and casual clothes, she could never be too careful. Everyone was looking for easy money, and right now her head was worth a lot.

This place, while not the typical jungle one thought of, was a man-eat-man world. It was survival of the fittest. Or, in Freddie's case, survival of the smartest. Admittedly, putting herself on the wrong side of the Ripper hadn't been her smartest move, but how was she to know that Will-dirt-poor-tattooist-Graham was fucking one of the most dangerous people in the city. It was comically hypocritical of him to go on preaching about staying out of mafia business when he was laying under one in his free time.

And even if she had known, the payout made it worth it. She wouldn't ever have to work again if she really didn't want to. And Dex worked as a safe haven to lay low at in the meantime. The Chesapeake Ripper would get bored with him eventually and then she could come back out in the open.

When that happened, and if she got the chance, she might try following Will around. With any luck, he'll lead her right to the Ripper. There were a handful of her contacts who'd pay any price to have that kind of knowledge. Like the knowledge she'd just pawned off in the basement of the bar.

Mums was such an interesting word.

Most knew it to be the slang for 'mom' or 'mother.' Common enough, people wouldn't stop to think of it twice. But it had another definition. 'Not speaking' or 'silent.' As in you bring in information, they give you cash for it, and then you're forgotten. No names were exchanged or pictures taken. There weren't even cameras put up to help ensure the anonymity of the clients.

This had been the first time she'd been able to come, though she'd found it to be, overall, underwhelming. The concrete steps leading down were cracked, with little dandelions poking out here and there. Grass was even growing out of the cracks in the brick lay on either side too. The entrance looked most unused.

The window had been painted black, so at first she wasn't even sure she'd come to the right place.

But two knocks and she was in a small round room with almost no lighting. A single small table sat in the middle of the room, with two chairs on either side. The air was cool and it took a moment for Freddie to realize she couldn't hear anything from the outside. It was soundproof. This was a room for secrecy and negotiations.

She'd smiled brightly at the man on the other side of the table when she took her seat.

It had been a fortuitous discussion.

Mr. Edwards had been such a lovely soul for telling her about it.

It really was a pity the Ripper mafia got to him.

But at least he'd gotten her in contact with the people who wanted to know how the girl had gotten away before he died. Otherwise, she would have been in quite a conundrum.

Another roar came from *Mums.* Whatever was on, the crowd seemed to love what was happening. Humming, she finished her cigarette and tossed it on the ground, smashing it under her heel.

"Don't you know it's bad to litter?"

Freddie jerked, her back flattening against the wall as her eyes scanned the area. But it was too dark. The inky pitch swallowed everything.

"And don't you know it's bad to be a hypocrite?" she called out, crossing her arms.

Soft, derisive laughter, and then he appeared a few feet in front of her, to her right. It was as if the darkness had just spit him out, because he hadn't been there moments ago. "I would think a hypocrite would be safer in this city than a snitch," Will said, hands stuffed in his pockets. "You do know what they say about snitches."

"Why? You about to give me some?" Freddie hissed, tossing her hair back. There was enough space she could make a run for it. And out of everyone she thought would come for her, he was low on her list for concerns. "Going to hit a girl, boss?"

Will gave a half shrug, one hand running through his hair before reaching his earrings. He was nervous.

Freddie grinned. She knew all of his ticks and quirks. She'd always been good about noticing things about people. At one point, she thought about becoming a journalist. But playing by

another person's rules never had much appeal for her. She preferred working odd jobs and hearing good information that sold well to tabloids. Or to the highest bidder.

And the thing about Will Graham was that he was always so concerned about what others thought. About playing by the rules. Being the 'good samaritan.' And beating up someone because of a mistake he made just went against everything he stood for.

"I'd rather not. But I need to know who you gave my name to."

Will shuffled closer, and then took a step back, like he was unsteady. His eyes were everywhere but her. The fact he never could look her straight in the face always drove her mad. Made her want to pick at him until he had no choice but to look at her.

Leaning back, she watched him. Even if he wouldn't do her real harm, there was no way she was going to let him reach her either. "And why should I tell you that? I already have one mafia boss after me thanks to you. I'd rather not have another." Freddie's eyes narrowed as she watched him.Will swayed from one side to another, color high on his cheeks. He looked inebriated. "And you're a fool for walking around drunk. Don't you know I'm not the only one with a price on my head?"

"Right," he said, the word pulling out long and slow. His brows pulled together, as though something were confusing him. "Because of you. And now I need to know who it is."

Those blue eyes flashed up, and then away.

Freddie snorted, pushing off the wall, to sway closer to him. She doubted he could even walk in a straight line, much less run. And while she knew he always favored his drink, she never thought he was actually stupid enough to do something like this. She hadn't touched alcohol since she heard that the Ripper mafia was after her. It would only end badly to muddle one's senses like that.

"Sorry Will, but I can't do that. I value my life more than yours."

"Then why did you give my name away?"

His words slurred together. It took Freddie a moment to put together what he'd asked. "Money. While being a secretary at a tattoo shop isn't too bad, you have to admit. Giving information to people who are willing to pay a pretty penny for it is a hell of a lot easier way to make ends meet."

Will rubbed his face. Dark circles hung under his eyes, like he hadn't slept in days. It's possible he was trying to drink himself to oblivion. While that was pitiful, it wasn't her problem.

"So you ruined my life for a little bit of money?"

"No," she corrected, tone sweet and patient. "I ruined your life for a lot of money." Freddie paused for a moment, looking him over again. "If it makes you feel better, it wasn't personal. I didn't have anything against you. It was just time for me to move on to something better."

His brows pulled together, lips moving silently as his mind worked overtime to process her words. Drunks were always slow to understand anything. And she hated repeating herself.

Sighing, Freddie tugged her hat down a little lower. “I think our business is done. I don’t expect to see you again.” Turning, she walked away, calling out over her shoulder, “Good-bye boss.”

The narrow alleyway back to the main street wasn’t far, and while the gate looked locked, it actually wasn’t. It was just a ruse to fool passerbys. Probably to keep kids from coming back here and tagging the place. It wasn’t like it would be easy for cops to see what they were doing.

Keeping her purse tight under her arm, she folded her shoulders in as she walked through it. Even in the height of summer, she could feel a slight chill coming off the bricks on either side of her.

A hand reached around from the dark and grabbed her throat, squeezing hard enough to cut off the shriek that threatened to break out of her. Panic and nauseating fear exploded in her chest. Her bag hit the ground as both of her hands reached up to claw at the one wrapped around her neck. She dug her nails deep, ripped off skin, but it was like they didn’t even notice it. Another hand came up to brace the back of her head to keep it still.

They didn’t want a broken nose.

A broken whimper slipped out of Freddie. Her feet kicked back, hoping to strike a soft spot, but body pressed into her back, making the motion fruitless. Heat radiated off him in waves, like a fever was running under his skin. And while he smelled of smoke and perfume, he didn’t reek of alcohol.

“Unfortunately, our business isn’t done yet,” Will said, his voice low and steady. It wasn’t the voice of someone drunk.

With a quick movement, he swung her around, smashing her head into the side of the wall. Pain and stars flashed behind her eyelids in bright white before consciousness slipped out from under her.

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

Well that was fun.

Out of the two cat names, which do you think is better?

Snitches, Stitches, and Ink

Chapter Summary

Will and Freddie have a talk.

Chapter Notes

The number of you who are excited for Freddie to get what's coming to her...isn't really that surprising, since I feel the same. It's like when your ship finally gets together or kisses for the first time. Which will be when, you ask? .....well, loose lips sink ships and all that good stuff.

Here you go my bloodthirsty little fanfic addicts. A taste of the retribution yet to come.

TW: implied torture but nothing explicit

Not beta read

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The basement of *Wolf Trap* was longer than it was wide. It gave the vague feeling of being in a semi's trailer, just without the grooves. The long, rectangular lights ran down the middle of the room, swinging low from the ceiling. They didn't do much to brighten up the space. The dark concrete floor and ceiling sucked up all the light, shrinking the space to claustrophobic proportions, and giving it a permanent moist chilledness.

It had been only half finished when Will's dad had bought the place. After he'd decided they needed a place to practice shooting, it had been redone, along with it getting padded and soundproofed. Or as soundproof as they were able to afford after all the necessary renovations were done.

While the people in the area weren't likely to call the cops at the sound of gunfire, more because they didn't want to get involved than they didn't care, it still paid to be prudent over cheap.

"Never let anyone know all of your cards," his dad had said to him when Will had asked him about it. They were standing in the basement, putting up the walls. They'd only hired others when it was clear they couldn't do it. Sweat dripped off both of them in thick rivets as

Baltimore suffered through one of its hottest summers on record. The humidity hung thick, giving the sensation of moving through soup. As the saltwater stung Will's eyes till they reddened, and his lips cracked, he stared at his father uneasily. They sometimes didn't have enough money for food. Soundproofing a basement had seemed reckless. "Always have an ace up your sleeve. For just in case."

His eyes had blazed a hellfire blue as he looked down at his son. He'd just officially untangled himself from the mafia a few days prior and was left black and blue from it. Then, he'd gotten a letter from his wife. Her wedding ring had been the only thing in it, leaving a different kind of wound.

Now, as Will sat in a folding chair across from Freddie and found another use for the room, he was grateful that his dad decided to stretch their funds. He twisted her dark grey hat in his hands. The bill folded under the mild pressure. Unsurprisingly, it wasn't of high make. The likelihood of someone hearing them was nearly nonexistent. Not that he believed anyone would even check in if they did hear something concerning.

It had been unnervingly easy to get her here.

Pretending to be a drunk couple had fooled anyone who passed them on the street as he waited for a ride. He'd taken Freddie's hat and pulled it low, standing in the shadows by a tree. It would have taken someone shining a phone light in his face for anything to be made out about it. Most pretended the pair hadn't been there at all. They'd sidled around them, avoiding any chance of eye contact.

The Uber driver had been even less difficult. He'd wanted to get them home as quickly as possible to avoid the chance of one of them throwing up in the back seat of his car. Will pretended to take her to her home. He dropped her off at his apartment where he took her inside, tied her up, and locked her in the bathroom. He'd then had the driver drop him off about eight minutes away at a random apartment before jogging his way back.

Not that he needed to go through that much trouble. The driver hadn't looked at him twice.

It was disappointing how easy that piece of the plan had been.

Running a thumb over the edge of the bill, Will leaned forward so his elbows rested on his knees. Despite the fact it was pushing four in the morning, he didn't feel tired. Adrenaline and something darker was rushing through his veins. The sensation of it all made him light headed.

The nightmare stag stood at the end of the room, by the shooting target, watching him. Its ebony antlers framed the light on either side, the top of its head almost reaching it. It huffed, pawing the ground. The sound echoed throughout the room. Letting out a wail, the stag shook his head, rattling against the light. It shown incandescent on its mixture of black fur and feathers.

If it had been anything other than a plague to Will's sleep, he might have found it beautiful.

When it rattled the lights again, Will narrowed his eyes at the beast. It stared him down imperiously with stygian eyes. It was impatient.

It'd been following him since he'd knocked Freddie out. Appearing next to him as he'd cradled her limp body, the euphoria of his catch hammering through him, he hadn't even realized it was there till he felt its breath caressing the back of his neck. His heart, which had been beating hard and fast, slowed to its normal rate at the sight of it.

Ignoring the stag, Will turned his attention back to the redhead in front of him. She was trussed up in a copy of the chair he was sitting in, head hanging limply to the side. Her hair hung around her face, obscuring it from view. Not that he needed to see her face. He turned his attention back to her hat, wondering how far he could bend the bill.

"I know you're awake," Will said, voice conversationally light, even as he continued to look down.

Freddie didn't move right away, but there was a longer pause between her next breath. He'd heard her shift in breathing almost half an hour ago. He wanted to see how long she'd try to play unconscious, but with morning coming, he had other things he needed to do before work.

And then like a flipping of a switch, Freddie's eyes opened, head pulling up and body straightening, like she was folding back into her own skin. She stared blankly at Will, fighting to keep herself under control even as her mind raced. Her head pounded, the light making her wince. She probably had an angry bruise already forming on her head. Her eyes flicked around the room. She'd never actually set foot in the basement while she worked for Will, but she knew exactly where she was.

It was mostly empty from what she could see. There was a metal rolling tray next to Will, like the kind they had in the tattoo shop. Cords snaked from it to the wall. A round table with nothing on it and a few chairs sat in the corner behind Will. Nothing hung on the walls or the door to her right. A drain sat right between her feet, the kind meant for easy clean up.

Despite the chill, sweat dotted her temples. Will sat in front of her, body angled forward. His hair had fallen around his face, hiding it in shadows. It took her a minute to realize it was her hat in his hands he kept twisting around. She swallowed hard, her throat constricting.

She was in dangerous waters.

Will unfurled her hat, sitting up and setting it on the rolling tray.

From her angle, she couldn't tell what else was on it.

"Do you always kidnap women who tell you no?" Freddie asked, her dry throat making her words crackle. "Don't you know that's not very nice?"

Will hummed, turning his attention to her. He leaned back in his seat, crossing his arms. "Don't you know it's not very nice to sell people out for money?"

“Girl’s gotta eat,” she said, lifting a slight shoulder. Her soft white tee pulled at the motion, sliding off to the side to expose her collar. She crossed her legs, her olive palazzo pants pooling around her bare feet. Her shoes were tucked under the round table, hidden in the shadows. The cool temperature in the room brought a soft pink to her cheeks and the tip of her nose. In all, she made a rather vulnerable picture.

The stag huffed, taking a few steps closer. Will could see the rat poised underneath.

“And a man’s gotta live. So, why don’t we cut the shit. Who’d you tell?”

Even with Abel doing some digging on her, he hadn’t been able to tell Will who she'd been in contact with. He had his suspicions,but he needed confirmation first.

Freddie was a lot of things, but as reckless as she was, she wasn’t completely stupid. She knew she was in trouble, and she prioritized her survival over anything, or anyone, else. Will wouldn’t kill her, even now he couldn’t manage to look her in the eye, but that didn’t mean he wouldn’t be willing to inflict pain in order to get what he wanted. He was desperate to save himself. And she’d rather avoid that too.

Bouncing her foot up and down, she pursed her lips. “Unfortunately for the both of us, it wouldn't end well for me if I told you. I do like my skin and limbs attached, and I will lose them if I tell you so much as an initial.” That was all true. An unsteady thrum in her veins had her shifting as much as she could. The bindings kept her fairly immoble. “But, maybe we can strike a deal. That way we both get what we want.”

Will stared hard, his face emotionless. His hands were steady when he reached over to fidget with some of the objects on the tray.

“No, Freddie. There’s not gonna be any deals. Either you tell me or you don’t,” he said, eyes sliding off to the side. “And I don’t think you’ll like how it goes if you don’t.”

She quirked an eyebrow, cocking her head to the side. Her toenails were going a bluish hue from the cold. “Well, if we can’t come to some kind of mutual deal then I don’t think we have anything further to discuss. You need what’s in my head, but I like my head where it is.”

Will’s shoulders shook, and for a moment Freddie thought he was having a fit, but then laughter echoed in the room. A rough chuckle. Like the kind she heard when he thought Bev said something that was surprisingly amusing. He pushed out of the chair, turning to face the tray.

“You have no bargaining chip Freddie. There is something after my life, and you are the only connection. Other than that, you have no further use to me. If you had told me back at the bar who I was looking for, we could have avoided this entire —” he paused, crinkles forming around his eyes as he thought for a moment. His hands rested on his hips, head tilted down and to the side. “— *fiasco.* You never even would have heard from me again if we’re being completely honest.”

His voice never raised above a casual level, tone thoughtful. Like he had all the time in the world for this conversation. Freddie’s eyes narrowed as she watched him lift something from

the tray. She blinked, the only sign of a reaction, as she realized it was a tattoo gun. That hadn't been what she'd envisioned, especially considering they were in some creepy ass basement. Something that had been tight in her gut relaxed.

When she'd left, he'd had a few guns out of order. She assumed he'd throw them away or send them off to get fixed. Apparently, he brought them down here to try and fix them himself. It wasn't really that surprising. He ran himself broke by being a bleeding heart and fixing one of those things had to be expensive.

Will fiddled with the instrument and then set it back down, sighing softly. "Now, maybe your business with the Chesapeake Ripper wouldn't have been over, but there's nothing you can really do to save yourself from that."

"What? You can't put in a good word for me?" she asked sweetly, batting her eyelashes at him. The rat was getting ready to bite. "I hear good whores can have a lot of sway with their lovers."

Will snorted, turning to look at her with one hand still on the tray. His expression was bemused. "That's what you think I am? Their lover?"

"More like a fuck toy, but clearly one they favor deeply. They put you on the No Harm's list. They want my head on a platter because of you," she said, words matter of fact more than pissed. Her foot continued to bounce, a little faster than it had been at the beginning.

"To be fair, that was all your doing."

"You can't get mad at every little slight. You'd never be anything but mad."

Will titled his head, lips curling at the edges. There was a hard edge to his expression now. The stag was standing directly behind Freddie now. "That was a 'little' slight? I'd hate to know what you consider a major one."

She huffed, wrists pulling experimentally at the ropes. " *To be fair* , I didn't expect them to go for you. Not really. Maybe a warning, get a little roughed, just to remind you to go about your business and not meddle in others."

"Come on, Freddie. You aren't that naive. You'd be dead already if you were."

Silence settled between them. And Will let it drag out to the point where it prickled the skin. He watched as she shifted, trying to subtly test his knots. She wouldn't be getting out unless he wanted her to.

Turning back to the tray, he grabbed it and began to roll it closer. "I'm sure you're aware of the saying 'snitches get stitches.' Though, I don't know much about stitching." Will stopped in front of her, the tray now close enough for her to see what was on it. Her hat sat to the side, but there were a few needles, ink, towels, gloves, and the tattoo gun. He pulled the gloves on, still not looking at her. He picked up the gun, prepping it. "Bev usually is the one who does the stitching if I really need them. Tattoos have always been my thing."

Turning to Freddie, his free hand darted out, faster than she expected, and grabbed her by the jaw. He tilted her head back, her hair falling out of her face, as he met her wide eyes, smiling. “I’m also not much of a piercer. Price tends to like it the best out of the bunch. But, you don’t need to worry about those,” Will said, indicating to the needles on the tray.

The tight grip on her face kept her from spitting something at him.

Taking a deep breath, he turned on the gun, moving her face side to side, eyes dark with thought. “As I said, stitches aren’t really for me, so the saying doesn’t really work. How about ‘slink and get ink?’ Or ‘the rude get tattooed?’” he asked, stepping closer to he had a foot on either side of her chair. He loomed over her, gun humming loudly in the quiet. Will watched as any remaining color rushed from her face, leaving her ghostly. “Even I’ll admit they’re pretty bad, but I think they get the message across all the same.”

“K-kill me and lover or not, the Ripper will gut you. They don’t like it when people don’t listen to them,” Freddie pushed out as Will forced her head to the side, her right cheek was facing him. Her heart slammed against her ribs, breath coming out in short, hard pants.

“That’s true,” Will agreed lightly, thumb rubbing against her jaw line. “So, it’s good I have no intention of killing you. I just need a name Freddie. Just give me a name and we can part ways.”

“So, you'll just let me go if I tell you?”

Her question was hardly a whisper, eyes staring at the tattoo gun raised above her head. He could almost taste her fear, her disbelief. She was sure that he'd hand her off to the Ripper when he got what he wanted.

“After this,” Will amended, lifting the gun, his attention momentarily pulled to something behind her. He titled his head, like he was listening to something. And then those eyes were back on her. “There are always consequences to our choices, Freddie. Now hold still,” he said, tightening his grip to the point of bruising. “This is going to get bloody, and if you squirm, it’s going to be a lot worse.”

———

The sky to the city was just beginning to turn a mellow yellow when he left the basement. Pausing in the alley, he watched the sunlight color the high rises and skyscrapers. The city was relatively quiet, or really as quiet as it got, for a Saturday morning. Many people were either sleeping things off or simply sleeping in.

Will exhaled, shoving his shaking hands into his pockets. Exhaustion pulled at his limbs, making his eyes feel dry and itchy. His feet ached from standing for so long. He might be able to get an hour or two of sleep in. Jack wasn’t expecting him. The shop wouldn’t open till ten. Freddie wouldn’t be going anywhere soon. He could eat, shower, feed his dogs, and then take a nap.

There were still a number of things he needed to take care of before the store opened. He needed to make sure things were in order to make sure his plan went off without a hitch. Or,

at least would be likely to go off with as few hitches as possible.

Yawning, he stretched, his stomach growling at him. He started to walk to his stairs, fully intent on crashing hard, when a black Bentley parked across the street from his shop caught his attention. He froze, mouth opening and then closing firmly shut. Instead, he rubbed his eyes, sighing heartily.

He really couldn't say he was surprised. Hannibal had already admitted to having men on him. He hadn't expected that to change since the revelation.

And it seemed the doctor could only go so long with not seeing Will. For one reason, or another. And there was no telling what reason it would be this time.

Before he could decide whether to cross the street and face the inevitable that was Hannibal Lecter or simply pretend he hadn't seen anything and go to bed, Hannibal stepped out of the car, looking fresh as a daisy. Three piece, fixed hair, poised stance.

They stared at each other a moment, and then Will gestured for him to follow. This was going to happen regardless, so Will at least wanted to be in his own home where he could take off his shoes and sit down. He wanted to be comfortable if he was going to get put through an awkward or painful conversation.

It was only when Hannibal crossed the street, coming to a stop next to the tattooist, that Will noted a small bag in his hand. It was a deep blue, with silver, cursive letters he couldn't make out from his angle. There were tufts of white paper sticking out the top.

It looked like a gift.

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

> Personally, I'd probably be giddy as hell about someone who'd tormented me finally getting karma-ed. She tends to hit harder than I could, so I let her do her thing.
>
> But, really, what was in the bag?

Conversations Over Breakfast

Chapter Summary

Hannibal wants to talk. Will wants to sleep. Guess who wins?

Chapter Notes

To you Kings of Late-Night-Reading, Queens of So-Much-Fluff-It-Hurts, Chaotic Monarchs, and Royal Pain-In-The-Asses, I am so sorry for the long break.

BUT HERE YOU GO.
FINALLY.

Not beta read. I apologize in advance.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Good morning Will."

Hannibal's tone was amused as he watched the tattooist eye the bag as though it might bite him. "Hello Dr. Lecter. Why are you here?" Will asked, not looking away from the bag. It was barely bigger than his hand. It wasn't the coat. It wasn't big enough. Or heavy enough by the looks of how it hung from Hannibal's hand.

"I was wondering if you would join me for breakfast this morning."

That got Will's attention. He squinted up at Hannibal, hands still stuffed in his pockets. The stag had finally appeared out from the basement. It stood right behind the mafia boss, nose aligned with the spine of his neck.

They breathed in sync.

Sighing, Will rubbed the back of his neck. He just wanted to sleep. If he could manage that.

Glancing over Hannibal's shoulder, he eyed the rising sun, and then the Bently. There was no telling how long the doctor had been sitting in his car, waiting for him to come out from the basement. His men had probably seen Will carting Freddie around and told him. And the mafia boss had proven to be a patient man. Hannibal, on the other hand, seemed to be a paradox of pushy and patient.

"You couldn't call?"

There was something like accusation running in the undercurrent of those words. Will still hadn't received even a text from Hannibal since they last talked, though he didn't strike Will as someone who texted. His phone had sat heavy in his pocket, almost burning his leg, since it had been silently returned. Every buzz had a concoction of dread and adrenaline rushing through him.

"Forgive me. After our last conversation, I concluded meeting in person was better."

"For who?"

Will's question wasn't sharp or accusatory. He tilted his head, trying to decipher his own tone. It was flat, as though his mind had wandered off, and his gaze slid past Hannibal's shoulder to the skyline. The memories of their last conversation had hovered around his conscious. Not always in focus, but never completely gone. But the anger was gone. Something else had brewed in its place.

Since he'd sent Abel off to find Freddie, the doctor had always lingered on his mind. More so than usual. It was as if Hannibal's shadow had lingered just over his shoulder for the last few days.

He remembered the question. Hannibal's voice rang in his ears asking what he wanted. Who he wanted to be. But more than that, he remembered the heat of Hannibal's hands as they gripped his knees. Remembered how his knuckles had gone white digging into the soft side of his knee, like letting go had been a painful process. The ghosting sensation of soft lips over his knees. But more than that, the heat that had rioted in his gut from it all. The breathlessness that came from more than just being near a predator like the Chesapeake Ripper.

Hannibal looked over the tattooist, noting the dark circles, the paled skin. Even the slight tremble that seemed to linger over the top of his skin. Like he was trying to shake off his own skin.

"I also believed that you would be too preoccupied this past evening to notice if I left you a message." *This past evening.* Not last night or this morning. Meaning he had suspected something since Will had left his shop with the crew. Maybe even before that. He didn't know how deep Hannibal's network went. "You have a rather unfortunate habit of not eating properly, and I would like to continue our conversation from last time."

Not as subtle a change in conversation as he usually did. Will took a step back, eyes turning back to Hannibal. He could admit to being surprised that the man wasn't pushing him for Freddie. Or at least to know how he spent his last few hours.

Will looked him over. Oxford red suit, pearl colored shirt, with a pocket handkerchief to match. A bone white watch with black pearls encrusted in it sat on his wrist, just barely visible. Probably not the outfit one would think a mafia boss would wear. And yet, there was no other way Will could imagine him dressing. He didn't look tired or tense. If anything, he looked more relaxed today then they had the last time they'd seen each other.

“Our conversation was over,” Will said, lifting his chin up. He shifted, trying to relieve some of the pain from his feet. Gods, he just wanted to sit down. But talking with Hannibal was like having a fencing match. You had to be on your toes if you didn’t want to be beaten. Or manipulated. “I don’t think there was anything left to be said.”

Hannibal offered a slight nod in agreement. “You left in look for an answer.”

“And you think you get to know it?”

Nothing came through Hannibal’s mask but that of polite curiosity. He didn’t feel like answering such an obvious question.

They stared at each other, letting the white noise of the world fill the space between them. The stag’s feather glistened iridescent in the morning light. Blood shined like gloss on its hooves. It loosed a long wail, shaking its antlers so that they rattled like fairy bells calling out from the deep of the woods.

Softly, very softly, Will asked, “And in the time you’ve avoided me, you think I’ve found one?”

“Have I been avoiding you?”

Therapist double-question bullshit.

Rubbing a hand over his face, and then through his hair, Will chewed on his lip. Hard enough to break the skin. He was fighting the inevitable by standing here, but just letting Hannibal do whatever he wanted didn’t work for him either. Letting Hannibal have control was like standing in front of a lion naked and expecting them to not do anything. You always ended up with teeth marks on your skin.

If he wanted to play a game, then Will would play by his own rules.

“You want breakfast? Fine. Let’s have breakfast,” Will said, turning away and heading for his apartment. He didn’t check to see if the doctor followed. He knew the man wouldn’t be able to resist his own curiosity.

He was surprised when he heard Hannibal hesitate.

If Will didn’t know better, he would say that Hannibal hadn’t expected that response. But then he heard his steady footsteps, soft whispers against concrete, as he followed. He didn’t argue when Will unlocked his door and pushed inside.

His dogs barked, swarming his feet before moving on to Hannibal who closed the door quietly. They ran in circles around him, sniffing his pants legs and shoes. Will wondered what they smelled on him, now that he knew what his actual job was.

Winston sat a few feet away, looking over the returner. His dark eyes bounced between them, before meeting Will’s gaze as if to ask *Really? Him again?*

Will patted his head as he passed to sit at the table.

Winston didn't greet Hannibal. Instead, he followed Will and sat next to him, pressing up against his legs. He situated himself so he could watch the newcomer and get affection. By this point, Winston was mostly healed. He didn't limp anymore. The only tell that something had been wrong were the areas that had clearly been shaved not long ago.

His pack remained circling Hannibal as he yanked off his boots. Will preferred it that way. Having the rest of them crowd around him was alway a slobberfest. One he could do without this morning. Some specks of blood dotted the sides of his shoes. He'd need to scrub that out, not that anyone would notice but him. And Hannibal, judging by the way the man was watching him peel off his socks.

By the time he'd pulled off his shoes and socks, Hannibal had already cut his way through the fur and licks, browsing through Will's fridge and cabinets. Or, rather snooping. He was both curious and controlling. Which lent itself to snooping. The small gift sat unassuming by the fridge on the counter. It almost blended in with the muted colors. Except even the bag was nicer than anything else in his home.

Standing, Will ignored Hannibal's criticizing look as he joined the man in the kitchen. If anything, the state of his food options were even worse than when the doctor had previously been there.

But, to be fair, Will had been a little preoccupied with other things. He opened his fridge and pulled out the eggs. There were still half a dozen left. Enough for two people. There wasn't anything really to add to them though. He didn't buy peppers or mushrooms or whatever the doctor tended to add to his breakfast. He could add some shredded cheese, but he had the distinct impression Hannibal would prefer to simply not have any cheese unless it was some high priced, non-Walmart cheese.

Tugging on his earrings, he shut the fridge door.

Setting the eggs on the counter, Will bent down and pulled a cast iron skillet out from under the sink, setting it on the stove and turning it on. The spices sat stacked in a corner in the furthest left side cupboard above the counter. He had to step around Winston who was following him around. He pulled out pepper flakes, garlic salt, pepper, and cayenne pepper. The olive oil sat a shelf above that. He grabbed it too.

Hannibal hovered, just behind his shoulder, watching his every move. Will could practically feel his judgment stinging the back of his neck. He could see the slight frown, the vague pull in his eyebrows. Miniscule movements, but all telling how unimpressed he was. And he didn't even have to look at the man.

Somehow the knowledge was still irritating even without seeing it.

Without looking at the doctor, Will added a little oil before cracking two eggs in the heated pan and said, "If you want to show up unannounced, you eat what I cook. You don't want to, you know where the door is. Otherwise, you can take a seat."

Hannibal didn't say anything. No doubt he was debating how much of a battle this was worth. Will had already fed him really one atrocious meal after another. At one point he

might have felt bad for that. Too bad his flying-fucks were out of stock.

There was a slight pause, and then Hannibal left Will to his own devices and sat down.

On Will's bed.

Winston pressed close as he sat too, his body heat soaking through Will's jeans. Letting out a long suffering sigh, Will's head tipped back, tapping the spatula against the counter. "Isn't it rude to sit on someone else's bed uninvited, Dr. Lecter?"

Hannibal hummed, running a hand over the rumpled plaid sheets, legs crossed. The comforter had been kicked to the end of the bed, the sheet twisted up from Will's nightmares. The pillows were scattered about. The ones that had fallen to the floor had ended up on Buster's dog bed.

Will ran the tip of the spatula around the edge of the eggs. He had yet to manage to keep them from sticking. And when they stuck, he always broke the yoke. He was better off making scrambled most of the time. But the milk in the fridge had looked questionable from the outside. He wasn't going to open it and see what it looked like from the inside.

"I decided if I had yet to tempt you into mine, I had a better chance of tempting you into yours."

The spatula clattered against the stove. It was only luck that had the tattooist catching it before it hit the ground. Will's head whipped around, eggs sizzling and popping in the pan, eyes wide. He had not just said that. Will had imagined that. He was beginning to hallucinate from lack of sleep. "Excuse me?"

A sharp smile was the answer.

Hannibal folded his hands in his lap, eyes dancing with mirth. The stag was standing by the bathroom now. "I believed you would be more comfortable if I remained in your line of sight. You appear to be on edge this morning. I would hazard a guess and say it is due to your lack of proper meal and sleep." Those dark eyes narrowed on the eggs that were popping in the pan, as if eggs for breakfast were *not* a proper meal. "Our bodies and minds tend to deteriorate when we do not take proper care of them."

What bullshit.

"Jesus Hannibal." Yanking on his earrings, Will tapped the spatula on the edge of the pan before flipping the eggs. He was too tired for this. But his bed was clearly *occupied* by a *pest.* One that clearly had no intention of being gotten rid of. "Seriously. Don't you have other people to see this early in the morning?"

"None more important than you."

Will's eyes narrowed at the well dressed killer. He was being suspiciously flirty. Will didn't buy it for a moment. Not after their last encounter.

He grabbed the spices he'd pulled out and shook a violent amount onto the eggs. Good-for-nothing, goddammed psychiatrist mafia bosses, upending his life and creating one whole fucking mess of it. The smell of heavy spices coiled through the air. For fucks sake.

"What are you really doing here?"

"I believe that is obvious, William."

Pulling a plate down from the cabinet, Will slapped two eggs onto it before breaking another two into the pan. The sound of sizzling and popping oil filled the small apartment. The dogs had left off Hannibal to crowd around Will's feet. Buster was practically sitting on his feet. "Your eggs are ready. Eat them before they get cold."

Hannibal ran a hand over his bed again, this time over the scattered pillows. Will refused to watch the ways the tendon in his hands shifted and moved, how his fingers dug a little into the material where his head usually rested. He looked out of place amongst Will's things. Hannibal withdrew his hand before standing to take the offered plate. His perusal of Will's things had at least given Will time to remember to give him a fork. He didn't need to give the doctor an actual reason to go and do any more rifling through his things.

Hannibal's footsteps were near silent. Will watched the eggs cook, throwing some spices onto his own pair.

A hand pressed into his back, the heat coming through even two layers of clothes, freezing him. The oil popped loudly, the spray barely missing Will's hands. Soft lips brushed his ear, just a whisper of the sensation. "Thank you, William." And then the hand and lips were gone, the doctor taking his plate to go sit at the little table.

When his brain came back online, Will realized he hadn't offered anything to drink. He doubted Hannbal would want his *Folgers* coffee. And he wouldn't find any tea in this house. Not even sweet. Water would have to do, but the man would have to ask for it.

A glance over his shoulder proved that Hannibal was eating the eggs. Will almost laughed at the barely hidden displeasure.

If he really found it that terrible, he didn't have to eat it. But he'd clearly taken Will's threat to heart and had no intentions of being shooed out the door.

His own eggs quickly cooked. He turned off the stove, attention sliding to the bag that hadn't been mentioned. This close, *Brilliant Earth* was easily readable on the side. It wasn't a store he was familiar with, but given the shops Hannibal generally frequented, it wasn't much a surprise.

Hannibal's eyes watched him, waiting for him to ask about the bag.

Will silently took his seat.

The dogs circled them, but only Winston got close. He laid at Will's feet, huffing loudly. The rest laid in their respective beds, eyeing the pair with hopeful eyes. He poked at his eggs,

finding himself not hungry despite the fact he hadn't eaten in a while. The nightmare stag had laid down next to his bed, its back resting against it. It looked far more at peace than it ought to be, since it habitually haunted Will's every step.

Hannibal paused his eating, seeing that the tattooist didn't seem inclined to. "Is something the matter, William?"

Will shrugged, shifting in his seat. His feet felt cold. "Stop calling me that."

"You seem determined not to call me by my name this morning, but I feel no need for such avoidance." Hannibal took another bite of his breakfast. "Does it make you uncomfortable?"

"Nobody calls me that. And *you* make me uncomfortable."

"Why do you say that?" He didn't sound upset or offended, just curious. Those strange eyes alight with mirth and mischief.

Will glared at his eggs. "Is there a reason I can't say that?"

Hannibal gave that slight smile. "If only because it is not true."

Will hissed, eyes sparking in irritation, finally looking at the doctor. The doctor who was still smiling at him like he knew everything. It made Will want to launch over the table and grab him by the collar. What he did after that was more up for debate. "And what would make you think that?"

"If that were the truth, you would have never let me into your home. You are much too cautious for that."

"I have before."

"Before you truly saw me, yes."

Will tapped his fork against the table, eyeing Hannibal up and down. It was true. It was also true that the last time Hannibal was in his home, he'd been drugged by him. It wasn't something that inspired trust for most people. Especially when the one doing the drugging was a ruthless mafia boss.

There was a lull in the conversation. Will petted Winston, who'd sat up at the attention. Hannibal finished his eggs.

"May I take a guess as to why you are uncomfortable?" Hannibal asked, after clearing his plate. His fork rested on the top of his plate, like he'd just finished a meal at a five-star Italian restaurant.

Will gestured for him to go ahead with a small jerk of his head. He knew the man would whether he wanted him or not. He was stubborn like that.

"I think you are unsure of my reaction."

Will swallowed hard, jaw gritting hard to keep from saying something he'd regret. "Reaction?"

"To you."

"About?"

Hannibal paused, eyes narrowing. His head tilted to one side, like a bird contemplating a rodent before striking. Will mimicked the movement.

Hannibal smiled softly. "What do you think has you so nervous William? You are not afraid of me, even knowing who I am. But you do smell of fear. And pain. Though, I daresay the pain and part of the fear doesn't belong to you."

"Quid-pro-quo, Dr. Lecter?"

"If you would like." As if this was only for Will's benefit.

"A thought for a thought. Seems only fair," Will said, pushing his plate away. He sat forward, arms braced on the table with his hands together. Hannibal mirrored the posture.

"Only if you call me 'Hannibal.'"

Will gritted his teeth. Why did it matter what Will called him?

"Fine. You start."

Hannibal almost purred in victory. "Very well. I think you have refused to use my name this morning, other than when I baffle you, to try and put some distance between us."

"And I think you've exclusively used my name this morning to show that I can't push you away."

"You haven't been eating well recently. Nor sleeping."

"That's nothing new. It's also hard to sleep knowing there's someone after my life. I would prefer to be left alone by everyone."

"Am I included in that list?"

Will paused. The morning light was bringing out almost a gold shine in Hannibal's hair. His eyes practically glowing with warmth. He was enjoying this. "Do you think you are?"

"Have you been waiting for me to call you?"

Will fought the urge to cover his phone that still sat in his pocket. Bastard seemed to know that he'd been waiting on him. That he jumped to check his phone every time it buzzed.

"Yes." The single word felt like it'd burned his throat coming out. Anxiety was beginning to swell in his gut. Something was beginning to build in him. "Have you been keeping tabs on

me?”

“Of course, William. I have been ardently waiting to hear what answer you came to. Will you be you, or will you allow yourself to be forced to be something less?”

Will’s breath ripped out of him, eyes sliding away to look out his window. The sun was just beginning to crest over the cityscape. The hum of the city coming alive with the new day couldn’t seem to penetrate into his apartment like it usually did.

“Who said I’d be less? Just different from what you want.”

“Anytime you allow others to dictate who you should be, you cannot help but be less,” Hannibal said, almost clinically. Like it was a simple fact of the world. “If everyone simply refused to be anything but who they really were, the world would be a much more interesting place, do you not think?”

“What will you do when you know?”

This was what had caused Will’s lack of sleep more than anything. Even more than the idea of some unknown mafia member coming after his head. His plan was already in motion. There was no stopping that, and he didn’t want to. Regardless of what it would bring him into. He’d already had securities put in place. He was ready. But he didn’t know if he was really ready for Hannnibal’s answer.

“I suppose that depends on your answer,” Hannibal said softly. Contemplation softened his features. He could probably read the anxiety that had settled over him. “If you decide to be true to yourself, I would be honored if you would allow me to walk with you as you continued to shed the trappings that others have tried to force you into.”

“And if I decide not to?”

Silence. Winston pressed against Will’s leg as his master looked down at his folded hands, smelling the sudden spike in trepidation. The other dogs shifted about, more interested in Will’s untouched breakfast than their master.

The stag pushed itself off the ground and hovered between them, nose almost touching the table.

Hannibal slowly reached across the table, almost telegraphing his movements, letting Will decide if he was going to allow him. Gently, too gentle for someone like him, he took Will’s hands. His fingers brushed over Will’s knuckles and the fine bone of his fingers till they loosened enough for him to slip his hands between them.

Peeling them apart, he pulled one of Will’s hands toward himself, tenderly pressing his lips to his palm. They were soft and warm. Electricity shot through his arm, rocketing his heart. “I would hope for nothing in the world but for the chance to show you how beautiful it is to be true to yourself.”

Air whooshed out of Will's lung. He'd stay. Regardless of the answer Will gave him, or if Will couldn't be who he wanted him to be, he'd stay.

He couldn't claim all the fear was gone, but he suddenly felt like he could breathe properly again.

"Okay."

Pleasure lit Hannibal's eyes as he pressed another kiss to his palm.

Unable to handle that expression, Will looked around the room. The bag still sat unacknowledged on his counter. Right. The bag.

Turning back to Hannibal, his gaze settled on the man's pearl colored handkerchief as he tilted his head in the bag's direction. "For me?"

Hannibal hummed, body languid with contentment. He still hadn't let go of Will's hand. His nose was now drawing soft circles against the soft skin of his wrist. Puffs of warm air against the sensitive skin had the hairs on the back of his neck arms rising. "Of course. It is a gift."

Will turned to the gift, and then his thoughts turned to his basement.

He pulled his hand free to pull on his earrings, something like a blush on his cheeks. "If that's the case, I have a gift for you too."

Hannibal beamed before pushing Will's plate back to him. A subtle reminder that he needed to eat. "I am alive with curiosity, dearest William."

Grabbing his fork, Will spearred his eggs. "Sometimes, I think that's the only reason you are alive."

"Not anymore, *mylimasis.* "

Will didn't know what Hannibal had just called him, but he didn't doubt it was something atrociously flirty. The man, for a ruthless mafia member, had a romantic streak that made Will want to bury himself from embarrassment. The stag huffed, giving itself a firm shake so that its iridescent feathers shone rainbow in the sunlight.

He shoved the food in his mouth to avoid having to respond, only to end up almost coughing it up. His eyes watered, throat seizing around the food to keep it from going down. Hannibal laughed silently at him. The deep rumble coming from him was almost pleasant despite the fact Will felt like he couldn't breathe.

No wonder Hannibal had looked so torn eating the food. Will had accidentally overdone the cayenne.

By a lot.

Next time, he'd just let Hannibal take him wherever he wanted and spare them both.

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

I enjoy fluff. It makes me happy.

The Gift of Unmasking

Chapter Summary

Will gives Hannibal his gift.

Chapter Notes

You know that feeling, where you're just on a roll? Like when your art is turning out perfect? Or you could just go on forever for a run? Or when your poetry is just writing itself?

This was not one of those times. I could see Freddie in my head, but describing the scene was a whole shish kabob.

But I just have a VERY specific scene I keep trying to get them to. AND IT KEEPS STAYING OUT OF REACH. ACK.

Not beta read

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will was almost impressed by Hannibal's refusal to wear anything but those ostentatious suits.

Despite the sun having just risen above the buildings, it was oppressively hot. The kind where you debated going out at all, even when you had no food in your house. The kind of hot that made you feel like you'd placed in an easy-bake oven and forgotten. A disappointing and irritating ending if nothing else, that leaves you a little charred, but otherwise unharmed.

As they stepped out of his apartment, the heat pressed in on them. Will's shirt stuck to his back, and his toes felt like they were sweating inside his boots. This heat couldn't last much longer, having already drug out for over a month. It's what Will told himself when sweat itched down his face after stepping outside to let his dogs out.

Summer always had Will questioning why he didn't just leave the city for somewhere further north.

Hannibal's grip tightened around his hand as sweat made it harder to hold. Hannibal holding his hand also made it more difficult to lock his door. From the firm grip on his fingers, Will knew there would be no way to get him to let go.

He managed.

Pocketing his keys, they made their way down his steps, the small bag dangling from Hannibal's free hand. The man was almost humming with contentment. Literally. Soft notes of something classical came from him, quickly swallowed up in the natural noises of the city. The hiss of floor grates, distant screaming sirens, cars buzzing as they went too fast, or horns blaring at the ones going too slow.

No words passed between them as they descended into the basement.

At the door, Will paused. This far, he couldn't turn back, and he couldn't find it in himself to want to. But, there was that pesky *what if* that whispered in his ear. The warning he'd lived his life by to keep himself safe. Or as safe as he could.

He fidgeted with the keys, pulling his hand free from Hannibal to pull at his earrings.

Hannibal was the Chesapeake Ripper. He wasn't squeamish about blood or violence. But he was the *Chesapeake Ripper,* meaning he was artistic and poetic. He created live renditions of famous, beautiful pieces. He also was a creator of his own murals. Always something majestic, intricate, fine tuned down to the smallest details. He would judge another's work based on those merits.

Will was no poet, and his little boat proved that he was no artist.

He wasn't sure what the doctor would think of what he'd done. Maybe he'd be disappointed. Or maybe he'd expect the limitations of Will's ability. Maybe he'd think Will had fallen short of what he thought he'd be capable of. Maybe —

His hand was snatched back, lips firm against his knuckles. "What worries you so, William? You have only just crossed the threshold. Do you have thoughts of turning back?" Hannibal asked, an eyebrow lifting.

Will glared at the man's tie. They both knew he didn't. If that'd been the case, he wouldn't be letting the mafia boss lavish his hand in those ridiculous pecks.

"Stop that," Will finally hissed, yanking his hand back, when Hannibal made to move his way up his arm. If Will thought he'd been bad before, it was clear that he'd been holding back. Meaning that things like this would only get more frequent. And more shameless. "Can't you be serious?"

"I am ever serious about you." The look in Hannibal's eyes proved that.

Clearing his throat, Will looked away, back to the door. He couldn't put off the inevitable, he supposed. Breathing deep, he unlocked the door and pushed it open. Hannibal's eyes gleamed with curiosity as he stepped through first, unable to hold himself back any more.

Will followed, shutting and locking the door behind them.

The smell of iron and ink was the first thing one noticed when they walked in. It was cloyingly sweet. Heavy in the air, it moved lazily through the room to fill every dark corner.

Like the heat outside, the scent settled over the skin, pressing in so that you couldn't get away. It teased the nose, enticing you to take a deeper, fuller breath so that you could experience it in its entirety.

The dim lighting only seemed to heighten Will's senses. Without much sight, it forced his other senses to go into overdrive to compensate, making the smell even more potent. A single overhead light was on in the center of the room. The basement had been transformed into a stage of sorts. It had the impression of the moment a character stands along to give a soliloquy, drawing the audience in effortlessly.

The light only made the shadows even darker. The corners of the room were pitch black. The shadows pressed in, coming alive with the chill and the smell of blood. It grew teeth and claws, breathing down Will's neck as he lingered by the door, keeping his eyes trained on his hands, flicking the keys back and forth between his fingers. It chewed at his heels and back, trying to swallow pieces of him as he kept a pace behind Hannibal.

He didn't want to see Hannibal's initial reaction.

Scuffing his boots, he listened to Hannibal's breathing, trying to determine how the man was reacting. A slight hitch, the softest of sighs and then—

"Oh William."

For the room being so cold, Will's skin was burning.

"She is flawless."

Will blinked, his eyes rising to find Hannibal standing only inches from him, body bent toward him, eyes dancing. It was like there was a pull between them that they couldn't fight. A gravitational pull. Something inevitable and dangerous.

Will pulled at his earrings, biting his lip as he looked at Hannibal and then away. He was proud of it. That thing under his skin practically purred under the approval.

"It's a little rough."

"As are all beginnings. You can only grow more magnificent from here."

Will hummed, rolling his shoulders back, his spine straightening and his head pulling up to tilt back ever so slightly. He gave Hannibal a crooked grin, body relaxing as he found no disappointment in Hannibal's expression, letting a bit of the beast that roiled under his skin show. If anything, he would say that the doctor was shocked at what Will had accomplished.

Stepping around Hannibal, Will approached Freddie, who was still unconscious. He wasn't sure if it had been the pain or the shock or the fear that had finally caused her to pass out on him near the end. He still didn't have a name yet.

Circling her, he evaluated his work from all angles.

Her entire face had been tattooed to look like a newspaper. The headline *Rat Infestation in Baltimore* was carefully scrolled across her forehead. Under the title, in quotation marks, it read, “The trouble with the rat race is even if you win, you’re still a rat.” And then under that, in neat paragraphs, were detailed accounts of everyone she had ever ratted out for money or to further herself and what had happened to each of them. Abel had been quite thorough in his findings about her. On her right cheek, there was a rat, boney and starved, teeth bared and eyes shining.

It was one of his best freehand tattoos he’d done. There were a few lines that were crooked, and some words misspelled. He found that suited her even more. It said more about who she was than if everything had come out perfectly.

“You have stripped her of her mask,” Hannibal mused as he stepped closer, hands folded behind his back. He had no interest in touching rats. Pigs were his prey of choice. “Anyone who meets her would know exactly what she is.” He studied the rat on her cheek. “Ravenous. Gluttonous. Greedy.”

Her usual pale, spotless skin was red and puffy, angry at the abuse. The skin was raised hotly under the ink, almost blistering, bringing the ink to life. It continued to bleed in some areas, making it even more poetic as it oozed out from under the words of her actions that had caused so much hurt to others. Maybe after a day or two, Will would go back and add in some blood.

Hannibal’s attention moved down to her clothing and bare feet. Disgust curled around the edge of his lips, tipping just so lightly down.

Her once neat shirt and pants were streaked with blood and vomit. At one point, her body had rebelled against the pain and thrown up, unable to handle it anymore. It’d splattered the floor and dribbled from her pale lips to her shirt and pants. The more liquid parts of it had trickled to the drain between her feet, but the chunks of undigested food had remained scattered on the floor. He’d need to hose everything down anyway, but it did create a foul smell in the small room.

Her breathing came in quick gasps, brows twitching from the pain. Will knew it was a battle for her not to move her face. Every little tug and twitch would hurt. Which would make her want to flinch, only causing her more pain. Sleep was a mercy.

Moving past Hannibal, Will grabbed her shoulder and shook her. Hard.

The jerking caused sharp pain to explode through Freddie’s face as her skin moved with the motion. Consciousness was harsh and ugly.

Peeling her eyes open, Freddie at first thought Will had sewn them shut while she’d been out. Instead, they’d crusted shut with salt water and blood. Her blood. Her stomach twisted at the realization. But more so at the fire that ran under the skin of her face.

“Fu’k’in’ ba’ta’d.”

The words were nothing but garbled noises as they were pushed through busted lips. Her eyes moved around the room, latching onto Will who hovered over her, blue eyes almost midnight in the lighting. They flashed with something gone too fast for her to identify it.

“You did tell me that killing you would make the Cheseapke Ripper unhappy. Besides, last time I checked, you *wanted* to live. Congrats. You got what you wanted,” Will said, grinning down at her, as he stepped away, hands shoved into his pockets.

It was darker than before. And the tray was gone. Or maybe the pain was just making things more difficult to see. Freddie swallowed, grateful at least that didn’t hurt.

“What…did —” her throat seized around the words as her lips moved too much and another bit of pain ricocheted through her. Everything fucking hurt. She couldn’t even speak properly. The last thing she remember was Graham pinning her head to the side to start tattooing her face. The fucking psychopath’s whore had *tattooed* her *face.* “F’ck.”

Will watched her struggle, face impassive. He looked away, eyes skittering to the side, fingers tugging on his earrings. Blue flashed back to her face, something practically beastly lining his eyes and lips. “Would you like to see? What I did. That is what you were going to ask, right Freddie?”

The darkness pushed on the edge of her vision, her head lolling to one side briefly. It was hard to think when everything hurt.

Will disappeared. Probably going to get some mirror, the sadist. He was no doubt reveling in her agony. She’d never done that. After all, nothing she did was ever personal. Sometimes, people just needed to get hurt if you wanted to accomplish your goals. Sometimes, there’s just no other way around that. Will Graham had just been one of those unfortunate people. And unfortunately, he’d proven to be a vindictive asshole.

Breathing deep, Freddie tried to focus on not moving her face. Whatever he did to her, it’d been extensive. It didn’t help she’d always had sensitive skin. She’d always needed to be careful about what products, makeup and skin care, she used to keep from breaking out. Either with acne or rashes. It’d gotten better as she’d gotten older, but even now, she was always thorough with picking out her toiletries. Her skin would not handle ink being shoved under it well.

“Here. Take a look.”

Graham was back, holding the silver tray that he’d had his tools on. Her lips pressed together, not wanting to look. She didn’t want to give him the satisfaction of her reaction. It was the only reason he was letting her see herself. He wanted her horror and revulsion.

He could go take a long walk off a short pier for all she cared.

Nostrils flared in determination, Freddie let her need to know lower her gaze to the reflective tray. Will had known she wouldn’t be able to resist looking. It was her inquisitive nature that had led her to this end. She had allowed it to control her, rather than the other way around,

and this late in life, it would be almost impossible to turn the tables. Her greed had just allowed her to find a way to utilize her natural personality traits to her benefit.

Shock was predictable. It was the body's first response to something unexpected. And no matter how one braces themselves for it, there's almost no preparation for the new. So Will wasn't surprised when that was the first emotion to ripple across her features. He didn't need to see her hands to know her fingers were curling in, nails digging into her palms to try and steady herself. Pain was a way of grounding the mind.

Her brows started to raise, till pain froze them. Her pupils dilated, lashes fluttering wide. Her lips parted ever so slightly before closing once more.

Devastation followed. Not that Will was surprised. She'd always taken great care in her appearance and dress. She'd weaponized her natural features so that her beauty stood out more than her claws and teeth. By the time someone realized she was shredding them, it was too late. Now with that mask stripped, it would make it almost impossible to accomplish that.

And, having your features changed, almost beyond initial recognition was always hard. He wouldn't deny that even he would have the same revulsion if he'd woken to someone doing something similar to his face. Even if he wasn't as beautiful. He'd basically stripped her of her identity and mask in one go.

Anger, no fury and resentment, came next. It lit those blue eyes like stars self destructing. It was really rather delicious to witness.

Will ducked his head down to hide his smile, hand coming up to hide part of his face.

Her face twisted, despite the pain he'd know it caused, her rage allowing her to push through the misery. "How…dare…you," she gasped, body going into overdrive to do what she wanted. She lurched forward, her bindings yanking her to a stop. The tendons in her neck went taut, collarbone pressing against the untouched skin of her chest. Will was a little surprised how well she was moving.

He crouched in front of, just at the edge of the lighting so that his back was enshrouded in dark. His arms rested on his knees, letting his fingers dangle. He set the corner of the tray on the ground in front of him, lazily twirling it around. The glare of it shot sparks of light scuddling into the darkest corners.

"That's an interesting thought," Will said, his voice soft and thoughtful. He didn't look away from the tray, eventually pulling Freddie's attention to it. "How dare I. I guess it's because I could and had the ability to do it. And I suppose the desire was there too. I probably wouldn't have done anything if I lacked the desire in the first place. Or maybe, if I lacked the motivation?"

He paused, frowning at the thought.

"You…ruined…my —"

“Life?” He asked, head falling to one side as the tray picked up speed. “Don’t be so dramatic. Unattractive people are born all the time. It’s not a novel thing. Well, maybe for you since you care so much for appearances. But won’t have an affect on your ability to nose yourself into other people’s lives. It’s not like I cut your tendons.

“Besides, one might say this is a fairly minor change in your life compared to some of the wreckage you’ve caused for others. Would you like me to go through them? How about your first? Despite it being several years ago, you must remember it. It was the first time, so you no doubt got such a high off it. The ability to use others to get what you wanted. And that it had been *so easy* . Do you remember Mr. Micheal? The little deli owner near downtown who hired you when no one else would? After all, who would want to hire some street rat who never learned to keep her mouth shut? But he did, didn’t he. He was kind like that. Naive too.

“And how did you repay him?” Will asked, pausing the spinning of the tray. Freddie caught her face in it. He started spinning it the other way. “Do you remember? You ratted him out to the Dynasty mafia. Despite being in their territory, he was getting his meat from someone else. And you snuck around and found out. Later his body was found in the sewage, chewed on by rats and something bigger. Not that anyone bothered to look into it. Do you remember him, Freddie?”

This time, Will looked up at her, clearly expecting an answer. Lips twitching, she jerked her head yes. Of course she remembered that old man. He’d been halfway to crazy by the time he’d hired her.

“You didn’t just ruin his life, did you. You ended it.” The tray never stopped spinning. “And then there was Miss Tabatha. A friend of yours from school. She owed a loan shark quite a bit of money. Of course, it wasn’t *her* that owed him. But when her father cut and ran, it became her debt. So, she went into hiding. And contacted you for help. And you helped alright. You helped line your own pocket and the loan shark. What was left of Miss Tabatha was buried at Baltimore cemetery at the age of seventeen. She’d always been a year behind the rest of your class. Did you know only three people showed up for the funeral? Her Grandmother, boyfriend, and youngest brother. Her father was still missing and the brother who was next in line had already gone into hiding. Not that it did much good. That same loan shark found him and—”

“Enough.” The words were practically snarled.

The tray stopped spinning.

“Enough?”

Those ever-changing blue eyes met Freddies. They were frostbite and ice.

“What a funny thought since you clearly never had ‘enough,’” Will said, lips peeling back to show his teeth. “You always needed more. Gluttonous. Averious. Greedy. Insatiable. Voracious. Heartless. Desperate. Rude.”

Will paused. Swallowed. He had to get himself back under control before he did something he didn’t plan. There were too many things resting on his actions to do something reckless.

“You only ever apply that word for yourself, but not to yourself.”

The tray clattered to the ground.

Will pushed to his feet, wiping his hands against his jeans. His emotions were swallowed by that thing that ran under his skin.

The stag keened in his ear. It breathed down his back.

Freddie’s lips twitched like she wanted to sneer at him. For someone who just found out they’d had their face taken, she rallied remarkably well. Or maybe that was just the desperation Will could practically smell coming off her skin. “So now what are you going to do, Mr. Boss.” The words were drawn out and slow coming. “You’ve used your trump card. You can’t kill me. You don’t have what you want and the Ripper wouldn’t be happy, remember?”

WIll huffed, hands tucking into his back pockets. “Truth be told Freddie. I’ve gotten what I’ve wanted from you.”

She blinked, face going stiff. Will’s gaze tracked how fresh blood seeped out further from some of the ink. One was right under her left eye, giving the impression she was crying.

She hadn’t given him anything. She’d managed to keep her mouth shut. But Graham not needing her anymore didn’t bode well.

Will looked down at her, eyes dark. “Truthfully, it was your own pride that allowed me to catch you. You were always too on guard for any mafia member to find. Too clever for the most part. You knew how to stay out of sight for the most part.”

There was nothing prideful in that. But Freddie could feel the man leading up to something. He was waiting for her to prompt him. “So?”

“To be specific, you were very aware of the Ripper’s men watching out for you. You had no problem giving them the slip because of it. You weren’t concerned about smaller groups, seeing them too insignificant to be much of a problem. You only ever considered them a threat if they approached you.”

Understanding slid across her features. “You had someone follow me.”

“And investigate. But, to be honest, that’s the limit of what I wanted them to do.”

Her eyes narrowed, shoulders drawing up. The darkness seemed to press in further, shrinking the area she could see. She felt watched. “Because you wanted to deal with me yourself? How bloodthirsty.”

Will shrugged, as if the description didn’t bother him. Though at one point not that long ago, it would have.

“Your mistake, Freddie, was always underestimating me. I knew I would succeed because I knew exactly how you *saw* me. Timid, weak, skittish. Too afraid of doing something that

would be wrong."

"And tattooing my face without my consent isn't wrong?"

"It's justice."

The words were sharp and cold. Nearly biting in their ferocity. Freddie couldn't stop the flinch.

She swallowed once, twice. Eyes running up and down Will, noting his hard posture and twisted expression. It was not the face of the boss who would always threaten to fire her when he caught her gambling on the shop's computer. It wasn't the face of when he was done to his last bit of patience when she popped gum in his face. It wasn't even the face when he caught her eavesdropping outside his office. All those had been alive with irritation and anger.

Now, he was nothing but ice and stone. This was someone who could kill her and then turn around and sleep like a baby.

"For all the harm you've caused. Not just to me. To every name that's now forever written into your skin. The law never did anything, and your luck always held out. But everyone runs out of luck once in a while. And I was waiting for that. So, this is for Miss Tabatha and Mr. Micheal and Abigail and me." Will's body angled forward, like he was getting ready to spring. His muscles tightened, heart picking up speed at the anticipation.

And just as fast, it slowed. Will released it with a breath, deliberately pushing it away. "But that doesn't matter now. You're meant to be a gift."

She didn't like the sound of that. There was really only one person who she would be a gift for. And Will-fucking-Graham was fucking them.

"A gift."

Will hummed in confirmation, scuffing his boots, like he was self conscious. It was a violent change. He'd just been staring down at her with all the rigidness of the arctic. But now his shoulders curved forward, spine giving under the weight of worry.

"And what a thoughtful gift she is," a voice purred from the dark, accent caressing the words, tone pitching them low and sweet.

The Ripper had been here the entire time.

Hannibal stepped into the light, one hand pressing into Will's back, while the other reached up to collar his neck. Lips found the sensitive skin behind Will's ear, before moving over the back of his earrings. Burgundy eyes were sharp on Freddie.

She'd never imagine the Chesapeake Ripper having looked like some European eccentric banker. Or someone who did nothing but spend hours sniffing alcohol. But there was no denying that was exactly who was staring her down like she was his next meal.

Hannibal was a blanket of warmth on Will’s back, his hand searing.

Will hadn’t realized how cold he’d been. Warmth now started at his spine, working its way through his core. Breathing deep, all he could smell was Hannibal. Heat and leather and something like old parchment. And beneath that, there was something else. It was as if he was sitting in a home. The warmth spread faster with every breath.

That thing settled in his chest.

Hannibal’s warm breath on his neck sent shivers up and down Will’s spine. “Now, if you kindly allow me to finally return the favor.”

The small bag appeared in front of Will, the silver letters glittering.

Will’s fingers brushed it when it was moved just out of reach. Huffing, Will twisted around as much as Hannibal would let him to give him a questioning look.

The mafia boss looked fondly at him, lips quirking with enjoyment. “If you would indulge me a little, *mylimasis.* Please allow me to bring you home before you open it.”

When Hannibal said “home,” he didn’t mean Will’s. It was also clear that bringing him into his house wasn’t the only thing Hannibal planned on asking him. There was that wicked look in his eyes that told Will he had things up his sleeve.

Will turned his attention to Freddie and then to the bag. He was beginning to wonder what he was about to get himself into.

“Alright.”

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

Freddie's thoughts on Hannibal had me wheezing. Poor man would be so indignant if he knew.

And what shall we discover when Will goes to Hannibal's home? NOTHING INNOCENT THAT'S FOR DAMN SURE.

hehe

The Lion's Den

Chapter Summary

The lion finally manages to pull the wolf into its den.

Chapter Notes

First: Yay! Finally an update.

Second: Sorry this took a while. Moving to the other side of the world, where you have everything to learn, turns out to suck the creativity right out of you. Six months and finally feeling a little normal. Whoot!

Hopefully we shall now return to a regularly scheduled program of seriously questionable (yet cutesy) ships.

Per usual: NOT beta read.

And no TW's other than some general fluff.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The car ride had been quiet.

Comfortable.

Enough so that Will had nodded off at some point without realizing

The gift had sat unassuming in the back seat, in view if Will chose to look over his shoulder. Neither of them mentioned it. Their hands were clasped over the console, Hannibal's thumb rubbing small circles onto the back of Will's hand, catching over a small scar that sat under his knuckles. Something symphonic had played lazily from the speakers, filling the space.

The morning light had illuminated Hannibal's eyes, reminding Will of dark cherries.

Will had slept against the window. Between the quiet hum of the car, and the soothing sensation of Hannibal running his finger over his hand, it hadn't taken long. He'd only woken when the humming abrupting fell silent.

Hannibal's house was ostentatious at best. Completely in character at worst.

He was asking people to notice him, flaunting who he was. It could be seen in the almost morbid etchings by the door frame of serpents. In the little, concrete lion statues that sat on either side of the front steps. In the pillars that reminded Will of that church in Barcelona with all the structure reflecting nature. In the garden of Aconitum, Azaleas, Jessamine, Oleander, and other flowers and plants he didn't know.

And yet, nothing about it was noteworthy when Hannibal was placed in the mix. Standing on his own front porch, the oxford suit and pearl shirt pulled everything together. It would have been more suspicious if he'd owned a suburban home with only some shrubs and concrete sidewalks.

Instead this monstrosity just aided his ability to blend in.

That's what it felt like. A monster Will was walking into the maw of.

A three-story, pale stone faux sleeping giant. A lion pretending to slumber as the pig inched closer in curiosity.

Will knew there were many who went in and didn't step out again.

Getting out, Will followed Hannibal who waited for him with the gift on the front stoop, hand on the brass handle. They stared at one another. There were a thousand things they needed to say, and yet Will couldn't get his mouth to work.

Hannibal opened the door.

Will stepped in first.

The hallway was long and dark in color palette. It closed in around Will. It was difficult to tell where he was supposed to go. Shadows grew wide and dark, filling every opening and crevice. The home of a predator.

Hands on his shoulders pulled his plaid overshirt gently off. It was hung on an unseen hook.

"Ever the gentleman," Will huffed, shoving his hands in his pockets as he waited for Hannibal to take the lead. He wasn't stupid enough to go wandering around. Not that the mafia boss seemed to mind that idea. He was taking his time hanging the button up on the hook, straightening out the wrinkles and making sure it laid neatly against the wall.

Hannibal hummed, eyes flashing as he turned back to Will. "One should always be polite."

"Except to the rude?"

"One must have boundaries, dear Will," Hannibal said as he took Will's hand to lead him deeper into the house. His palm was a heater. "Otherwise it gives the illusion of giving permission for others to be impolite."

Will allowed himself to be guided without putting up a fuss. There wasn't really a point anymore. Not since he'd seen Hannibal's reaction to his gift. He'd joined the beast in its revelry.

. The inside of the house matched the outside.

What looked like an entry hall, or maybe a greeting hall, was the first true room they walked into. Marble floors, vaulted pale ceilings, deepest of blues walls, and art Will wouldn't bother pretending to appreciate. In the middle sat a round, wooden table with an ivory stag statue sitting on it.

Hannibal didn't hesitate to lead Will to the spiraling staircase directly ahead of them.

"Where are you taking me Hannibal?"

Will wasn't really expecting an answer. If the doctor had wanted him to know, he'd have already told him. He just needed to break the rhythmic echoing of their footsteps and quiet breaths. That and the pounding of his heart was distracting loud in his ears.

Hannibal stopped at the first landing, tugging Will down a black hallway with wood trim that matched every door.

He gave the tattooist a small, elusive smile. "Are you worried William?"

"Should I be?"

"Only if you were anyone else, *mylimasis."*

Will quirked a brow at the repeated pet name. "Do I want to know what you're calling me?"

Hannibal pulled him through a doorway, flicking on the lights when he entered, movements slow and calculated. "Do you wish for me to tell you?"

Will squinted at the man, eyes on the barest up tilt of one side of his mouth. He was trying to decide if he was going to be stuck with the double-questions for the rest of his life. He hoped with time the doctor would become more straight forward, rather than constantly feeling the urge to poke at him.

He doubted Hannibal would ever get easier. It was more likely he'd just get better at handling the man.

"Why do you insist on being a pain in…why are we in your bedroom?"

It wasn't a guest bedroom. It smelled too much like Hannibal.

The room was all soft tones, the exact opposite color of what he always associated with the man. . The walls were some muted light brown or grey color, with more French designs for trimming decorating them. The ceiling was a textured white. A round night stand stood on either side of the bed. The dark wood of the bed frame was carved in a French design, the headboard arching high above a mountain of pillows

The comforter looked like fine silk, mirroring the color of the night sky.

A single window took up the entire wall opposite of the doorway, cream black out curtains and the same comforter blue gossamer shielding the pair from the morning sunlight.

A massive mirror hung against the wall, directly in front of the bed. Wood edging swirled around it, following its oval shape. It was impossible to miss as it sat in the middle of the wall, reaching almost from floor to ceiling. And there was nothing else. No closet, no dressers, no paintings hanging on the walls. Just a mirror that made Will nervous.

This time, there was a flash of teeth when Hannibal smiled. He seemed almost giddy now that Will was finally here in his home. If Will had felt generous at the moment, he'd have thought it cute. But he wasn't feeling generous. He was feeling distinctly tired and grubby. And still hungry. Those eggs had been burned away with his nerves. Or maybe the amount of cayenne had just eaten their nutritious value away before he'd gotten it to his mouth.

In other words, he was feeling as cuddly as a terrified porcupine.

"With you having put in such long hours, I thought you might prefer a chance to rinse off before we continue our conversation. Maybe change into something more comfortable," Hannibal said, stopping at the foot of the bed, directly in front of the mirror.

Will caught sight of himself in the mirror, and his gaze instantly dropped to his shoes. He did look a wreck. Pale, a little too thin, and maybe a little dirty. It was hard to tell with such a quick glance.

Tugging on his earrings, Will looked askew, focusing on the window. It somehow felt dangerous to look at bed. And he wasn't going to look at himself again in the mirror. "Mm, yeah, probably. But I don't bring any spare clothes. I hadn't expected to be offered a shower."

"Do you think me someone who would offer something without being able to provide for your needs?"

Will's eyes flashed towards him in suspicion. False innocence looked back at him. "Did you steal some of my clothes?"

"Come now Will. You would have noticed if anything had gone missing."

It was true. Will didn't have a lot to choose from to start with.

But the mafia boss just looked too damn pleased with himself for Will not to be worried about what he was up to.

Hannibal squeezed his hand, leaning over to set the blue bag on his bed. Slow, unconcerned, patient. His unruffled nature made Will want to be obtuse.

But his scalp itched. And he wanted to get the smell of Freddie off him.

"Fine. Where's the bathroom?" he asked, moving to let Hannibal lead him back out into the hallway.

Only for the man to move to the left side of the mirror. He pushed on the wall and a hidden door opened to reveal a bathroom of whites, golds, and blues.

“Are you fucking serious?”

“On the other side is the closet.”

Will wasn’t surprised.

Edging into the bathroom, he found it just as massive as the bedroom. White walls, white floors, white counters. A deep blue stone was used in the shower and the claw footed bathtub was actually bronze rather than white, with gold designs running along the bottom.

Blue bath rugs, blue towels, blue hand towels.

“I didn’t know you liked blue so much,” Will remarked, doing a small circle in the middle of the room. It was pristine. No water stains, toothpaste marks, or water residues would be found in this room. He could not say the same thing about his own bathroom. “Reds have always been my read.”

Hannibal hummed, pulling out a blue towel from under the sink and pressing it into Will’s hands. He used the opportunity to lean in close. Nose to nose, Will couldn’t resist meeting those dark eyes. “I must admit, my probability of choosing it has increased rather dramatically since our first meeting.”

Will wasn’t sure he was breathing.

“However, no company has yet to replicate the color of your eyes.”

Will blinked. Once. Very slowly.

His heart was not beating very slowly at all.

“Oh.”

Those thin lips quirked up again for a brief moment. But then their foreheads were pressed together, bodies inching closer so they could almost touch, and Will finally breathed out. The large, fluffy towel was acting as a barrier, and he dug his fingers into the material to try and keep himself from accidentally tipping over from how light headed he suddenly was.

Slow, synced breathing was the only sound for a long time. And with time, he gradually unwound. Allowed himself to relax. For his muscles to loosen, jaw to unclench, and stomach to settle. To grow comfortable with the idea that the mafia boss wasn’t going anywhere. And he wasn’t going to put Will somewhere six feet underground either. If anything, it felt like he was more likely to tie Will to him with a rope that wouldn’t go further than six feet.

“Please use whatever you wish in my shower.” Hannibal’s thickened voice finally broke the quiet moment between them, pulling his head away only a few inches. “I shall leave clothes for you on the bed.”

Will swallowed, nodded mutely, and pulled away. He wasn't sure he could say anything if he really wanted to.

"I will be in the kitchen when you finish."

Will lifted his head at these words, the wordless question on his face.

"You need to eat more. And that food from this morning," again he hesitated over the word food, much to Will's amusement, "wasn't nearly adequate enough to be considered a decent breakfast. Allow me to cook for you while you clean up. You are abysmal at taking care of yourself."

"I'm not that bad," Will croaked, rubbing the back of his neck.

A slight lifting of an eyebrow challenged that statement. Will didn't have the energy to argue with the man.

"Where's the kitchen?"

"Ground floor. Just follow the music." He paused, eyes swirling. He reached up, just barely brushing a thumb over his jawline. "Take your time, William."

And then Hannibal was gone, the door silently shutting behind him, giving Will his first bit of time alone in over twenty-four hours. He went a little limp.

He just wasn't sure if it was because of how tired he was. Or because of how his knees had gone a little weak from Hannibal's touch.

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

Alright all my adorable, fanfic gremlins, I know I am (without any self-defense) a slow burn author. So who other than me is finally happy after 23 chapters of disappoint (Hannibal and readers), cliffhangers (readers), and blue-balls (still Hannibal, though he'd never admit it), we are FINALLY HERE.

F**KIN' YEAH.

slamming keys as I push on due to excitement

Gifts & Games

Chapter Summary

Old fears rear their ugly heads for Will.

F**k Fredrick Chilton.

Chapter Notes

hehe.

I'm sorry.

Definitely not beta read and written on a caffeine high. Read at your own risk.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He did indeed take his time.

He let himself rest against the counter for a few minutes, just breathing in the scent of Hannible. He shoved his face into the towel, unable to resist. The soft material was just an added bonus.

Eventually, he was able to talk himself into actually going through the motions of showering. He liked how he felt after it, and even how the shower felt. He just never liked the effort it took in actually doing it. It tended to feel like one step too much when he was as exhausted as he was.

But he was dirty. And he smelled. In Hannibal's home.

He let the shower water heat while he stripped.

Hannibal had to have one hell of a water heater. The room was billowing with steam by the time he'd removed the last bit of his clothes. Not that it was too surprising. He had a hidden bathroom. He probably even had a hidden basement knowing the man. Maybe he'd pull a Beast and magically open a door to a massive library to try and romance him with. Though, it was a little too late for that one. A good water heater just seemed a given.

Stepping under the spray, he couldn't stop a low, pained groan from slipping out of him. The warm water soothed the muscles in his back from bending over Freddie for hours. It worked its way to his scalp, warm tingles rolling through his skin. His toes curled and uncurled, bending his ankles this way and that to relieve some of the ache from standing in the basement. Will stood under the spray for a while letting the water take off the first layer of dirt, sweat, and chills.

Turning to the wall of blue stone, Will stared at it a while. He ran a hand over it, feeling the smooth, coolness of the surface when something occurred to him.

Hannibal had insinuated that he'd been recently buying blue items because of him. And now Will couldn't help but wonder if this wall had always been blue. Then he eyed the towel he'd left on the sink. They were the exact same shade.

"What a ridiculous, dramatic, over the top, fucking tooth rotting romantic, son of—"

He snatched the first bottle on the shelf. He didn't understand why the man had to be so damn difficult all the time. If it was the double questioning, it was always something else.

Will turned the bottle over to read what it was. It was written in Italian. Will fought the urge to curse at the bottle for being difficult too. It was a dark brown bottle, with a pretty green label and gold lettering.He then saw it also had "shampoo" in very small print at the bottom, under all the other words.

He decided he could be as generous as he wanted with how much he used in his hair. If Hannibal-mafia-boss-Lecter could afford secret bathroom doors, then he could certainly afford to have as many bottles of the fancy Italian shampoo shipped to himself as he wanted. Hells. The man probably had several spare bottles of the stuff tucked away into some closet of the house for just in-case purposes.

Once Will's hair was nice and lathered, smelling a mint and maybe eucalyptus, he briefly considered wiping soap stains all over the smudgeless glass of the shower.

He only barely managed to resist.

The conditioner was no different. Same fancy Italian brand. But it had a more mild scent. Neither smelled like Hannibal.

His body soap and oils did though. It had a richer, even earthier tone. Still not exact, but a lot closer than the hair products had been. Will backed out of using too much of it at the last moment. But he was still pink around the ears as he scrubbed his skin, purposefully keeping his thoughts on anything but the fact he was in Hannibal's shower.

He toweled his hair and body off thoroughly before heading towards the bedroom. He didn't want to drip water all over the floor. The towel felt marvelous on his overheated, over-scrubbed skin after he finished.

He wrapped it around his hips, pausing when he caught himself in the expansive mirror. It wasn't really a surprise Hannibal was so focused on his eating. He was thin. He ran a hand

over his skin, worrying at the scars and more bony parts. His collarbone jutted out, like something out of a horror movie. And pale like a monster too. He really needed to spend more time outside with his dogs. He'd probably look a little better if he had some color. It would probably also help hide the dark circles hanging around his eyes like visitors who'd overstayed their welcome.

He twisted to look over his shoulder, trying to see himself like Hannibal seemed to. A broke man who looked like those cheap suckers kids put tissue paper around to make them look like ghosts during Halloween. Rubbing his neck, he rushed out of the bathroom.

Clothes were waiting on the bed, just as Hannibal had said they'd be. As was the gift. It had been placed on top of the neatly folded clothes. A silent request.

He moved the bag to the side, deciding he most certainly didn't feel like finding out what was in there while he was still naked as a jaybird. It was heavier than expected for its size.

Cream silk slippers, soft cream toned pants, and an open-necked emerald shirt of silk. The man really did like his silk. There was even underwear.

Will checked their size.

He'd gotten all of it right, from the shoes to the underwear the right sizes. Dammit.

Ignoring the hard blush coloring his ears, he yanked on the clothes. Logically, Hannibal had probably gotten his size during his time snooping through Will's stuff. But it was also just as likely that the man could just guess his size that accurately.

The clothes felt good against his skin. Soft and comfortable. He found he didn't hate looking at himself in the mirror quite as much in them. The green didn't wash him out and none of the clothes made it look like he was wearing things three sizes too big.

There was just one last thing.

He stared at the bag, hands on his hip. He pursed his lips. There could be any number of things stuffed in the bag.

Will tilted his head, playing with earrings.

The last time it was a very nice jacket. And Hannibal wasn't the person to downgrade. In fact, Will could easily picture him as the person who purposefully set out to outdo anyone else in gift giving. And he was the person who'd remember the small but meaningful things people liked. The things that people actually like and aren't just flashy or expensive. Something that would endear him to the person somehow. Make them easy for him to use later.

But Will was different. He'd see through those things. He usually could see through people enough to know what they got him.

But Hannibal was different. His aim for Will was different too.

Carefully, Will pulled the paper out of the bag, peaking in to see a box inside. He tipped it out onto the bed.

It was the same style as the bag. A wide, flat blue box with silver lettering.

The lid slipped off with ease. Will froze.

Pearls. Black pearls that shined with enough luster they looked like they were metal.

He slammed the lid back on it.

It wasn't a set of earrings. It was a necklace and an earring for each of his piercings. There had to be tens of thousands in money sitting in the box alone.

Hannibal had shown an inordinate amount of interest in his ears. There'd been multiple times the man had touched his earrings or practically kissed his ears. And he was stupidly possessive.

Will opened the box again. He stared at the jewelry.

The necklace was made of pearls no larger than the pad of his pinky. It would sit close against his throat. And most of the earrings were studs save for four that he assumed were supposed to go at the bottom of his ears. Those hung from the finest gold chains, with black pearls in the shape of delicate teardrops hung. When they went in, two on one side would be longer than the two on the other side. Or he could mismatch it.

He wasn't really sure how they were technically supposed to be worn.

Was he this as Hannibal telling him that he was finally 'claiming' him? The visual representation of Will losing the battle of wills they'd been having since day one? Hannibal might have wanted to give him a gift, but that didn't mean it couldn't serve two purposes.

His jaw twitched at the thought, fingers tightening around the lid still in his hands. He gently put the lid back on the box. The stag was breathing in his ear, stomping its hooves on the nice wood floor. It'd disappeared since he'd let Hannibal see Freddie.

He hated to lose. But more than that, he hated being controlled. Hated the idea of not being seen as an equal. Or somehow being seen as less than because he hadn't gotten away or hadn't been smart enough. He braced his palms on the bed, head sinking between his shoulders.

Hannibal was much too used to winning in their exchanges. Too used to everything going his way. And this would be the ultimate win.

Old wounds he thought had healed were seeping, staining his thoughts. This wouldn't be the first time someone had fooled him enough to earn his trust. Though, the last hadn't won his affection. Not like this. It'd still ripped him open when reality had come tumbling in around him as articles about his condition started appearing everywhere. As everything he'd ever divulged in confidence was splashed in black and white for anyone and everyone to read over the breakfast of powder donuts and scrambled eggs.

As people, reporters and general creeps, started coming to his place of work just to get a look at the man who was a cocktail of fucked up.

The stag keened, fur shaking.

“Damn you,” Will growled at the pearls. “Damn you all to hell Fredrick.”

Will was shaking by the time he pushed up off the bed. He was going to have to do something, or this would eat at what was left of his pathetic soul.

He needed to turn this game upside down.

_____

“Hello Will. Do you feel better?” Hannibal asked without turning away from the stove. He had multiple pans on it, sizzling and popping with flavor and spice. He stood in his socks, his jacket tucked away, and sleeves of his shirt rolled up in a canvas apron to keep the red sauce from staining his clothes.

He’d heard the younger man quietly walk in, even over the sound of the lilting music from the record player. His presence was electric in many ways.

The kitchen was somehow bigger than the bedroom. Wider, though not taller. And all in blacks and whites, other than the copper and silver cookware. An island with a black and white marble top sat in the middle of the room. Black cabinets curled around the room. A kitchen bar sliced out a portion of the room, near the stove but close to the wall too. Black and white bar stools on the opposite side so anyone sitting on them would be looking into the heart of the kitchen. Hannibal’s guest was supposed to sit facing him. In that spot, there was no easy way out, tucked into a corner. Easy to see from where Hannibal would spend a lot of time. And easy reaching distance too. A quick swipe of an arm and they’d be dead in an instant if he needed to. And with no windows, there’d never be an accidental witness.

But Will didn’t sit on one of the bar stools. And he didn’t appear at Hanniabl’s shoulder either to investigate what the doctor was doing either.

“Much.”

A thud followed this proclamation.

Hannibal paused in stirring the sauce bubbling in the copper pan. Shifting to look back to Will who was standing at the island in the middle of the kitchen, he found him bare necked and bare eared. He’d removed all of his jewelry but wasn’t wearing any new pieces.

And then saw the blue and silver box now sitting right in the middle of the counter.

Will braced his forearms on the marble top, fingers lacing together as he looked dead at Hannibal. There was something very much haunted in his expression. It was dark enough that Hannibal froze. “I figured we could play one last game.”

“Game?”

Will raised an eyebrow at his confused tone. They both knew he wasn't confused about anything. "The game of you pursuing me, and me doing the smart thing and walking away. All games need a finale, right? Otherwise, it wouldn't be a game." He popped off the lid to the box and set it to the side. "This seems like a pretty loud statement of ownership."

Hannibal turned the stove off, anticipation and dread running up his spine. "Not ownership. You are, and always will be, your own being."

"Then your victory."

"Is it possible I just want to give you something nice?"

Will laughed and Hannibal smiled softly at the sound. He moved near, taking up his stance on the opposite side from the tattooist. He was curious as to what exactly was going through the tattooist's head.

"I never said that you didn't want that. These," Will said gesturing to the box, "can just do more than one thing at a time, can't they Hannibal."

"I suppose that is possible, William."

Will tilted his head back, so he was looking down at Hannibal as he pulled the lid off the box. The pearls shined luminous under the bright kitchen lights. He picked up the necklace first, laying it on the countertop so it formed a perfect circle. They both stared at the piece of jewelry for a moment.

Will tapped at the clasp of the necklace. "What would you be willing to do to get me to wear these?"

His voice was as gentle as the silk he wore, but his gaze was anything but. Hannibal tensed, refusing the urge to swallow as he found himself being stared down by a wolf. Finally he hummed, letting his own monster peek back.

"What would you ask of me?"

"Let me change the question. Would you risk anything to see me wear these?"

"Anything is a very big thing, *mylimasis."*

"Yes or no, Hannibal. No double questioning or side-stepping here."

Two beasts stared at one another for a very long heartbeat. The music swelled and crashed under the tension.

"Yes."

The answer was just as quiet, just as sharp, as the questions had been.

Will pulled out each piece of jewelry, gingerly arranging them in the space between them. Hannibal watched, eyes sharp as he watched the care Will took to handle each pearl.

Only after every piece was perfectly placed and the box was removed to the kitchen bar did Will speak again.

“You’re going to give up control, Hannibal.”

Hannibal’s finger twitched at that. His mouth tightened and forehead creased slightly. Will smiled. The mafia boss didn’t like where this was going one bit. He had control over hundreds of people. Could make things happen with a single phone call. Silence anyone without batting an eyelash or losing a second of sleep.

Will needed to know that he’d see him as an equal and not as a pet that he could tell what to do. Or force him to do what he wants when Will refuses. They were similar, not the same. And he needed to know that when those moments came, he wouldn’t get angry. Not like Fredrick. Would spread him out and poke at his vulnerabilities.

There was no denying that Hannibal was ruthless and controlling. But there was a difference between doing something in anger and doing something in spite. Just like there was a difference in doing something that would hurt someone, and doing something that would specifically shred them to pieces. People did stupid things when they were angry or hurt. Will needed to know Hannibal could control *himself* when he got upset or lost control.

“You are going to gamble. You win, you get to put a piece of jewelry on me. After all the pieces are placed, you win the game and I stay. Or,” Will said with a voice like night and smoke, “you lose and I walk out of your life forever.”

Hannibal cocked his head. This was a predator calculating its odds with another of its own ilk. He was determining his chances of winning. “In order to get you to stay, I must win multiple times in this game. However, I lose a single time, and that is the end.”

“Just like life. You lose in life and there’s no do-over.”

Hannibal’s eyes darkened. He’d gone completely still at his words.

“Very well.”

“Then let the game begin.”

Will prayed Hannibal didn’t lose.

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

Trauma, unfortunately, has a way of impeding our joys in life. Gotta tell them to go eff off cause we love ourselves, and they aren't our responsibility to carry around other people's shitty behavior.

But, guys no really. We're sitting around 90K words and we still have someone after Will's head and decidedly not playing by the rules. I really should have done an outline for this stupid fanfic rather than letting my characters tell me what to do.

Hi-Lo

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal play a game.

Chapter Notes

Tension be thicc in this chapter.

Also, I 100% took this game from reading/watching Heaven's Official Blessing. Love that damn book.

Naturally: not beta read.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Do you know the game Hi-Lo, doc?” Will asked, setting his phone in the middle of the table.

“The card game where you guess whether your next card will be higher or lower than your previous one.”

“Only this is a little different.”

Hannibal eyed the dice on the phone.

“If I had real dice, I’d use them,” Will said, eyes never leaving Hannibal’s face. “But this wasn’t exactly a planned thing. So, we aren’t going to play it the traditional way.”

“Then how is it supposed to be played?”

“You will choose either high or low for each round. Then we both roll. For example, let’s say you pick high.” Will pretended his fingers weren’t shaking as he touched the screen. The dice rolled. “Six. And then I roll.” Again he touched the screen. “Ten. I got the higher number. I won.”

“I lost.”

“Yes.”

“I pick high, I need a number larger than the one you roll. I pick low, and I need the dice to roll a smaller number than what you roll.”

“Yes.”

It was a simple enough game. Straight forward. And all chance. There was no one to bribe, bully, or threaten into doing what either of them wanted.

The food sat cooling, only half cooked, completely forgotten on the stove.

Hannibal looked at the jewelry. “I need to win ten times in a row.”

“Yes.”

It was a staggering amount. In reality, the chances of anyone winning that many times back to back was always going to be fifty percent with only two outcomes for each time. It felt a lot less likely. Will’s fingers curled into his palms. Hannibal didn’t miss the movement.

“Will—”

“High or low, Dr. Lecter?”

Will almost never cut him off. He knew Hannibal would hate it. It was rude. But he didn’t want to hear whatever he was about to say to him either.

“High.”

Will went first. Four.

Hannibal rolled a seven.

“Okay, so you get to put a piece of jewelry on me,” Will said, wiping his palms on his pants. The kitchen felt just as hot as it did outside. There was sweat beading between his shoulder blades and he could feel the heat radiating off his skin. He wanted to ask Hannibal to turn up the air conditioner. Or maybe get him some ice.

Long fingers touched his collarbone, startling him. He hadn’t even heard Hannibal move.

Blue met burgundy for only a moment. And then Hannibal slid close enough that they lost eye contact, taking his time to push Will’s hair back to see one of his ears clearly. One hand lightly cupped his chin, tilting his head to the side. Neither said anything, even as they were close enough to feel the other one breathing.

A gold chain was slid through the bottom hole, meticulously drawn through so it didn’t pull harshly on his lobe. The black teardrop brushed against the heated skin of his throat, just past his jawbone.

It was time for the next round. The pair didn’t move much. Just shifted enough to face the phone. Will stared at it like it was about to bite him.

“High.”

Will nodded and rolled. This time it was a three.

Hannibal got a nine.

Relief bubbled in Will at the sight of the higher number. But they still had another eight rounds to go.

One of the shorter chained teardropped pearls went next. Hannibal’s thumb kept brushing the soft skin right under Will’s lip when he slid the earring in this time. It was off-kiltering enough that Will closed his eyes and tried to pretend it was Winston coming for attention. And Winston’s warm breath running over his cheekbone.

One last brush of a thumb under his lip and then Hannibal let go. His right ear was done. Only the necklace and his left ear was left. Two things. That felt easier to think about than eight rounds.

“Did you redo your bathroom after we met?”

Will hadn’t meant to ask that. But he couldn’t get Hannibal’s words out of his head either. No company could replicate his eye color. How many times had he tried? Did he browse online, or manually drive to every ritzy place he knew to look? Did he talk to professionals and try to get a custom-make only for it to fall short?

Will could feel the pause. Even though nothing seemed to change. Hannibal didn’t tense, his breathing didn’t hitch, his fingers didn’t tighten on Will’s skin. But there was a moment of thought. He was trying to make a decision very quickly.

“I think we both already know the answer to your question William.”

“Then you shouldn’t have any issue saying it.”

They were still close enough to share breath. Will’s head was still tilted to one side, his eyes on the black pearls shining in the light. Hannibal swallowed.

Will didn’t wait to hear his response. “High or low.”

“High.”

Will’s fingers spasmed on the counter. One hand curled into a fist while the other reached out and tapped the phone screen. Ten.

Will’s eyes never left the phone as Hannibal touched it.

Beating a ten wouldn't be easy. There were only two numbers he could roll to win.

Twelve.

Will’s stomach was still in knots.

This time it was a pearl stud, slid into the top hole of his left ear.

“Are you ever going to give me my gun back?” Will asked this time as the doctor put the back on the earring, making sure not to pinch any skin.

“Do you require it?”

“How else would you like me to handle another situation like what happened outside *iBar* ?”

Will gaze never left the counter, but he didn’t need to look at Hannibal to know he was still angry about that. “You do not need to worry about such things happening again.”

He couldn’t help but sneer at the words. The man liked control to the point he thought he could foresee every possible situation. Like mistakes didn’t happen. “You aren’t infallible, doctor. One misstep and I’ll be the next one those suits put a bullet in. Or you. I’m sure whoever is hunting hasn’t missed your particular presence in my shop. They don’t need to know you’re the Ripper to want you dead.”

The predator in Hannibal didn’t like that one bit.

The man shifted even closer, practically looming over Will. Like he was a shield. Or death about to claim its next mark. “If you would like it back, I have no issues with returning it.”

“Then why didn’t you return it to start with? Why keep it at all?” Will didn’t wait for an answer. “Or did you just want me to beg for it back, Mr. Ripper? Like all the rest of your victims.”

Hannibal’s breathing was steady, unlike Will’s. And it just made him angrier. The doctor was always in control. The very opposite of himself.

“William, you are not a victim to me.”

“No. Just a prize. High or low?”

A goddamn prize. That’s what he was. For his empathy. Or his ability to see through others. How many people had seen him only for that? Almost like being a human lie detector. A prize was all he was really good for after all. It wasn’t like he had a mesmerizing personality or a face that turned people’s heads. Why else would people pay any attention to him?

“Will—”

“High. Or. Low.”

There was a quiet moment. Neither of them realized that the record had stopped playing at some point. “High.”

Will gritted his teeth.

He rolled a three. “Is there any particular reason you keep picking high?”

The chances of the second roll behind higher than the first every time…it just seemed less likely to happen with each round.

Hannibal a six.

“Does there need to be?”

Another stud was put in. Six rounds left.

“For Christ's sake.” Will yanked away from Hannibal the moment he’d finished putting the earring in. He needed room to breathe. It always felt like the doctor sucked all the air right out of him whenever they were that close. “Can’t you ever just answer a question?”

Hannibal watched him pace around the island. The building tension in the room was quickly reaching a boiling point. It made the hair on the back of his neck stand on end.

Will came to an abrupt halt, rubbing his forehead. Wide, wild blue eyes flashed up and then dropped back down again. Hands braced on his hips as his body twisted to be angled away from Hannibal’s watchful gaze. “Well. Six turns left.”

Hannibal hummed in agreement, pushing the phone towards Will. “May I ask you something William?”

“High or low?”

“High.” Hannibal looked him over again, taking a few steps around the island but stopping when Will tensed. “What is the purpose of all these questions?”

The tattooist hit the phone, but didn’t look at it or at Hannibal. “What do you mean?”

He rolled a two.

“It feels as if you are really wishing to ask me something, but you cannot bring yourself to. So, instead, you ask me other things.” Hannibal got an eight.

“You did steal my gun.”

“It does not surprise you that I kept it.” Will had to hold his snort in at the change in phrasing. “You are aware of who I am. “

“So, that gives you permission to do whatever you want? I wanted it back.”

“‘Wanted.’ Past tense. It is not what is bothering you. Or, shall I say, it is not the reason behind what is happening right now. It is not the cause for the sudden need for a finale,” he said, closing the space between them to put another stud in his ear. “High.”

The game was halfway over. Will couldn’t breathe.

He got a six.

Hannibal didn't reach for the phone this time, instead keeping his full attention on Will. "What is really going on William?"

His tone told Will that there would be no distracting him this time. His patience had given out and he'd only made it to the halfway mark.

Will still wasn't looking at him. "I told you. All games need a finale before the grand prize is handed out, Dr. Lecter. They always have high stakes."

"Do you see yourself as a prize Will?"

"Isn't that what I am? A carnival prize," he said, grinning wide. Cheap, dirty, and often a little broken. A novelty picked up in a moment and tossed away just as quickly. Or abused by a child swinging it around before being trashed for something better.

There was no air in the room. It was like breathing underwater.

Soft hands, unrelenting but gentle turned Will. "You are not a prize."

Will laughed, a hollow bark that echoed in the room. He was looking everywhere but at Hannibal or the phone. "Roll the dice, Dr. Lecter."

"Will, you are not—"

"Roll."

He did.

There was a pause. "I lost."

Will's head snapped around to look at the phone. A damning three stared up at him.

No. That wasn't supposed to happen. He'd only gotten a six. A fucking six. There was no reason he should have won this round. Maybe when he'd rolled that ten, but not with a measly, fucking *six.*

"Will."

Will flung out a hand, palm out to Hannibal. "Wait. Wait." He reeled back and away, turning his back to the doctor. Maybe that was supposed to happen? Didn't he set the rules up in such a way that it was really the only outcome? So, wasn't it really what he'd been secretly hoping for.

"William."

He'd never played well with others to begin with. He'd known that his entire life. Friends weren't the same as lovers. What had he been thinking allowing himself to get so close to Hannibal Lecter, mafia boss extraordinaire? Hadn't he already learned his lesson?

Will covered his mouth. He squeezed his eyes shut. "Fuck."

At least he should have known this was coming. It wasn't anything new after all.

Hands grabbed him, hauling him around and backing him up so he crashed into the fridge. Hips pressed into his, with them chest to chest. Forearms slammed on either side of his head, Hannibal's face inches from his. "William." His voice was graveled, accent thickening to the point where Will's name was almost unrecognizable. "Look at me."

Will did.

Hannibal's eyes were so dark they were almost black. His pupils were blown wide, swallowing almost all of the iris. "You are not a prize."

Will tilted his head back, closing his eyes to focus on breathing. "Then what am I, Mr. Chesapeake?" His voice was thick. The question was jumbled from the tightness of his throat. "What am I?"

"My everything."

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

Hmmmm...wonder what's gonna happen after that little proclamation.....

Broken Rules

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal talk and then address the lost game

Chapter Notes

After this chapter, you no doubt will guess it, but someone is certainly going to be targeted by the Ripper. And maybe a new companion.

Not beta read

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will stared at Hannibal like he'd grown a second head. "What?"

The older man looked dead serious. Will could see no lie in his face. He'd meant every word he'd said.

"Will, why have you ?"

The question was still spoken inches away from Will's face. He looked away, and then back to Hannibal. "Is there a reason I shouldn't see myself as a prize?"

"Most human's do not see themselves in such a light."

"I'm not most."

"Exactly. All the more reason I find it unfathomable to see yourself in such a way. Seeing yourself as one only lessens your worth." Hannibal pressed into him more firmly, not allowing the man to escape this time. "Your empathy seems to have betrayed your foundations by another's doing, and I wish to help you undo the damage done."

Will rubbed the spot between his brows. It was hard to explain. Or, more accurately, he didn't want to go through the headache of explaining it all. To talk about Chilton with any sense of normalcy or detachment often involved a bottle of whiskey in his system.

And getting drunk around Hannibal felt a little like laying in the mouth of a lion and expecting him not to bite down. He wouldn't be able to withstand his own curiosity to let such a moment pass him by.

“You are so much more than the trappings you force yourself to wear.”

Anger shot through Will. He grabbed Hannibal by the collar of his shirt, catching him by surprise enough he easily reversed their positions. He slammed the man back, twisting his fingers in the expensive material.

“Who’s really doing the hiding here? I’m not a mafia boss pretending to be a caring psychiatrist.”

Hannibal’s hands wrapped around Will’s hips, fingers tightening to the point of bruising. “I told you before, I am always myself for the right people.” He paused, looking over Will’s face. “And I never lie to myself about who I am. I never allow myself to be forced to become something less either.”

“And I have?”

The words didn’t come out like he intended. He’d meant for them to be a jab. Angry and forceful enough that Hannibal understood to back off. Instead, they wobbled. Like a tower of blocks that’d been built on a die. It just wasn’t big enough to hold the bigger squares.

Hannibal leaned down to press their foreheads together. “Have you not?”

Will swallowed hard, refusing to look away first. “Then how do you see me?”

Hannibal let out a heavy breath, adjusting his grip on Will’s hips. His hands shifted to his over the silky green material, moving the to small of the tattooist’s back where spine and hip met. A firm push had their bodies twisting into a shape that had the barest resemblance to that of a question mark, with Will’s back arching to accommodate the pressure, his head pulling away, and Hannibal’s following so they never lost contact.

The movement caused the pair to push away from the fridge, walking backward till Will’s hips hit the island.

Will rubbed Hannibal’s shirt between his fingers. “How do you see me, Dr. Lecter?” The doctor tensed and shifted at the sound of his name, like he wanted to protest. “A mongoose you want nearby for the snakes? A tattooist who keeps more dogs than he can afford? A good samaritan who puts his nose in places it shouldn’t?” Will paused to take an unsteady breath, refusing to drop his gaze from Hannibal’s. “A prize to be won? What do you see, when you see *me* ?”

“A work of art,” Hannibal started, the words slow and meticulously enunciated so that there would be no misunderstanding. One hand left Will’s back. “A wolf in sheep’s clothing.”

The hand that had disappeared reappeared at Will’s ear. Another stud slid through, the back added with deft fingers. Four pieces left.

“A well of understanding.”

Another stud was added.

“A mind of wonders.”

A chain was pulled through, letting the pearl swirl freely around. Will couldn’t even feel the weight of it added to his ear. It would be easy to forget it was there at all.

“Someone left alone for too long.”

The last earring slid into place.

“A man capable of beautiful things.”

Finally, the other hand left his back as Hannibal slid the necklace around his throat. Will let go of his shirt to run his fingertips over the black pearls hugging his neck. It didn’t feel like a collar. It radiated off his pale skin, matching with the green of his shirt perfectly.

“My match.”

Will blinked rapidly, but refused to look away. Hannibal wasn’t lying. He could hear it in the steadiness of his tone. The way he swallowed right before he talked, like he was nervous of Will’s reaction. The slightest pinch of his brows. The way those dark eyes would look down briefly or to the side, before forcefully returning to meet his gaze.

“My equal.”

“Oh.”

It was all he could really think to say. Even if he’d hoped for something nice, he hadn’t expected this. Not the severity or the conviction he found in Hannibal’s face.

Obsession.

The word clanged through Will’s mind. A stone plunking into still water.

It had occurred to him once before. Hannibal could be obsessive. He’d already seen parts of it in his personality. The Chesapeake Ripper even more so. The mafia boss had let that shine through his work too. He was controlling, single-minding, manipulative, and obsessive.

Will should care about it. It should bother him. But, he was no different.

He also had those traits. They just showed in different ways. He could read almost anyone at a glance. His clients, his workers, his bosses. How could he not use those things to his advantage to get people to do things that would best protect and hide him. He’d single-mindedly and maybe obsessively hunted Freddie down. He’d refused to let Bev or any of them tell him what to do.

And it wasn’t as if Hannibal hadn’t been on his mind all the time. As though he hadn’t pushed and maneuvered the man into doing what he wanted. He could still taste cayenne on the back of his tongue.

“Oh,” Will said again, followed by a soft chuckle. It was really too ridiculous.

He couldn't help it. It was that or crying from the relief and shock rocketing through him. The soft laugh turned into a full on, side splitting laugh. Once it had started, he could hold it in. In the end, it was only Hannibal grabbing onto him that kept him from sliding to the floor.

The mafia boss was perplexed, his brows lifting in surprise at the sudden bout of laughter. And then, settled into something soft and focused. Like he was memorizing something.

After a moment, when Will's laughter started to subside, Hannibal nosed his cheek. "Pray tell what is so humoring for you."

Will grinned, wide and unrestrained, shaking his head. "Nothing. Just realized something."

Hannibal hummed, his arms wrapping around his waist again. He wasn't letting go until his curiosity was satisfied.

Will dropped his head to his shoulder. "I just realized we share a lot of the same personality traits. We really might be a match-made-in-heaven."

"Then I shall pity those who try to separate such a divine told pairing."

Will pulled back, tilting his head. "I think I'll pity them. I can imagine what you'd do to them."

Hannibal practically beamed. "Can you? How marvelous."

"You did say I was your match. Why couldn't I?"

"What an enchanting mind you have, *mylimasis,"* he said, pressing a quick kiss to Will's temple.

Will snorted, pushing away but not breaking free from his embrace completely. "I think you might be the only person on this planet who would say that I have an 'enchanting' mind."

If anything, Hannibal looked even more pleased at his words. "Oh really? Not even Miss Katz?"

"I think she'd describe me as a stubborn ass. Not enchanting."

"Not even your mind?"

"That she'd describe as full of fluff."

The doctor looked bemused by this description. Probably because he could tell it was both an endearing description and an exasperated one. "So, no one has thought of it as beautiful before. How terribly sad."

Will looked down. One hand reached out to draw patterns on Hannibal's sleeve, while the other tugged at his new earrings.

"William?"

There was an elephant in the room that they probably should talk about. Sooner more so than later, since it was the underlying cause of the Hi-Lo game.

Clearing his throat, he said lightly, “Once, someone told me that my mind was deserving of study grants.”

“Study grants.” Hannibal drew the two words out between pursed lips, like he was tasting them and finding them unsavory.

“Mm, that my mind was worth its weight in millions. Could make anyone famous in a single night.”

Hannibal’s fingers flexed, briefly digging into Will’s back. “This would not so happen to be the same person who published those lovely articles on you a handful of years ago.” His words were frosty.

Will wasn’t surprised that Hannibal had already put two-and-two together. His fingers tugged even more harshly at his earrings. “My first and final time befriending a psychiatrist.”

“Until now.”

Will met his gaze, giving him a smirk. “Are we friends, Hannibal?”

Those eyes sparked, turning predatory at the sound of his name. It was like he’d been starving and finally been given food. The man hummed, fingers gently massaging Will’s back, slowly reeling him back in. The sensation sent sparks up Will’s spine, his knees going weak momentarily. It was wholly distracting to have someone touching him like that. “I suppose what we are is much too complicated to put such a basic label of friendship on it.”

Will titled his head back, ignoring the building heat in his stomach, looking down his nose at the older man. He lifted an eyebrow in challenge. “Complicated? I thought it was rather straightforward. Or am I somehow mistaken, Dr. Lecter?”

Oh, he certainly wasn’t a fan of being called that by Will. He could tell by the way Hannibal tensed, eyes flashing in warning at the sound of his title.

“Then what do you think we are, dearest William?”

Will would have been more shocked if Hannibal had answered straight out.

“Are you letting me decide? How uncharacteristic of you Mr. Ripper.”

Again, displeasure was there and gone in Hannibal’s face. “I believe, *mylimasis,* you’ve decided every step of our relationship thus far.”

“With some nudging from you.”

“Naturally. I did not want to leave you in question about my own desires. That would be cruel.”

“Which you would never be, right Mr. Mafia Boss?”

Those eyes narrowed, hands pulling even tighter across Will’s hips. “No crueler than you, dear.”

Will laughed, flashing a wide grin at the older man, before humming in consideration. The man was fixated with hearing Will say his name. Not that it was surprising.

“I suppose so. After all, I did leave poor Freddie in the basement all by herself. The rats will have started to crawl on her by this point.” The image, while fitting, also churned his stomach.

A peck on the corner of his mouth distracted his thoughts. Will’s brain short-circuited momentarily. The goddamn mafia boss was going to fry him with all these sneak attacks. “Never fear. My men have already moved her to a more secure location.”

If anything, Hannibal was becoming more and more touchy. Will wasn’t sure how he’d survive if this trend continued. He already wasn’t used to it. If it got worse, he didn’t know how he was supposed to cope with the sudden onslaught.

Trying to distract the man from giving any more kiss attacks, Will pulled at his necklace. “And you lost. What makes you think you can put the rest of the jewelry on me?”

He didn’t really care. In fact, he liked the brief feeling of the earrings brushing his overheated skin when he moved. Or how the cool pearls felt. Not that he’d tell Hannibal either of those things. The man already looked far too pleased with himself. He was liable to combust if he puffed up any further.

Hannibal cocked his head to the side, his tone playful, “Shall we play again?”

He was clearly enjoying this.

“If you want. But if you lose, I’ll stop calling you by your name.”

Hannibal really didn’t like that one bit.

“Or,” Will said slowly, running shaking fingers over the pearls again. His stomach pitched, tightening in anticipation. His brain kept telling him to be brave, even as he was ready to bolt for the door. “You can take the penalty for breaking the rules.”

Will could feel the vibration through Hannibal’s chest when he laughed. There and gone. So quiet it could have easily been missed by anyone else.

“Oh, what has that enrapturing mind thought of this time, *mylimasis?* ” Hannibal asked, pulling Will close enough that only inches separated their lips. Will wasn’t breathing, eyes wide as he stared at Hannibal. “What would you have me do to right the wrong?”

It was something in his tone that flipped the switch. It was both mocking and daring. As if he didn’t believe Will had it in him, but that he was praying to any god that would listen that he

would do it. He was teasing and so, so serious about his question. Like speaking to an adult who was many treated like a scared child.

It was enough to push Will right over the edge.

Heartbeat thumping hard and blood rushing in his ears, Will gave the man a crooked smile. If the doctor wanted him to shed his shell, he supposed he could honor that wish. “Nah-uh. That’s not how it’s going to happen. You have to pick. Do you wish to play again, or do you want to take the penalty? Be very clear here.”

The doctor stared him down. Anticipation lit those dark eyes like an all consuming fire. “Very well, William. I am choosing the latter.” His curiosity wouldn’t allow him to choose anything else.

Will raised an eyebrow, grabbing him by the chin to hold him still. “Are you sure, Dr. Lecter? Think very carefully. There’s no going back on your word.” Now he was just being an ass to be one. He knew the man wouldn't go change his mind. He never did once he set his mind to something. But, if Hannibal wasn't going to take him seriously, then it wouldn't hurt to push his buttons a little.

It seemed Will’s absolute refusal to call him by his name was getting under his skin. “Of course, William. Have you ever known me to go back on my word?”

The tattooist chuckled, getting even closer. Close enough that when he spoke, his lips brushed over Hannibals. “Well then Dr. Lecter, you have to do *everything* I say until I say your name. Your name, not any of your titles. You break before then, and the same loss penalty will still apply. You won’t *ever* hear your name come from my mouth again.”

With that, he grabbed Hannibal by the nape, fingers running through his fine hair, and smashed their lips together.

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

slinks to the exit Now I must return home.

There's no way I'm writing the next chapter in a public setting. Lord have mercy, what if someone looks over my shoulder to see what I'm typing so furiously about. 0-0 I'd die of embarrassment on the spot and you'd never get the next chapter. Wouldn't that be a shame?

The Torture of Silence

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal make up...and then some

Chapter Notes

TW: SMUT - DON'T LIKE IT, DON'T READ IT - SKIP THE ENTIRE CHAPTER BUT LIKE THE LAST LINE

Other than that: next warning, this is my first time writing smut. I apologize in advance if anything is weird or doesn't sound right. You know what they say about practice and all that.

Note: Not beta read.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The kiss was fire.

It burned and devoured everything around them, till the rest of the world may as well not have existed at all. Hannibal was consumed by having the taste of Will on his tongue after so long. And all Will felt was the way Hannibal's hands blistered his skin, drawing lines of electricity all over his skin. Tongue and teeth and heat. There was nothing gentle in it. An explosion at first touch. How long had they danced around this? Always getting close, but never crossing the line?

Now that they weren't holding back, everything came in like a torrent, ramming through any barriers or boundaries they might have drawn. Heat flooded Will's face, and his stomach had become a net full of butterflies.

One of Hannibal's hands tangled in Will's hair, moving his head so he could kiss him deeper. His scalp was a rush of tingles. He wanted to bite his lip and arch back further into the sensation. Hannibal's other hand fisted into the material at Will's lower back, pulling him even closer. His fingers kept loosening and adjusting. It was as if he couldn't get a good enough hold. From chest to thighs, there was no space between them.

Will's own hands were just as busy. One hand kept a firm grip on the back of Hannibal's head, while the other ran up and down his chest, feeling the muscles flex and tense under his exploratory touches. Heated silk and cool buttons. He clawed at the material, wanting to feel the way Hannibal's skin lit up under his palms.

They parted just barely, breath hot and lips moist.

"Will—"

Will slapped his hand over his mouth, silencing him. Hannibal's breath puffed hard against his callouses, eyes widening ever so slightly. He hadn't expected that. Lupine eyes stared up at the mafia boss, a smile of all teeth bared. "No talking Dr. Lecter. Not till I say."

The challenge blazed in those red eyes.

"You know the rules," Will breathed on the back of his own hand. He pressed his mouth to his hand, grinning. The skin grew hot and wet under his quick breaths. "And the consequences for breaking them."

His hand was jerked away, their lips colliding again. Neither felt air was the most important thing at the moment. Instead, they searched for their next breath in the other. Will found himself flattened over the island, the chill of the counter radiating through his shirt to his simmering skin. One of Hannibal's hands still grasped his hair, but the other was planted on the countertop right next to Will's ear.

Will licked the inside of Hannibal's mouth, dragging his tongue over the back of his teeth. He nibbled gently at the man's bottom lip, tugging at it when it was pulled away.

Hannibal groaned.

The noise was ambrosia for Will. Fireworks erupted in his stomach, lighting him up from the inside out. He wanted to hear that sound again and again. The hand on Hannibal's neck dragged down, his fingers so he could claw at his back. He wanted to know just how much Hannibal liked the things he did. But, he also wanted to torture the man. Just a little.

"Nu-ah," Will warned, the words almost lost against searching lips. "No sounds. I want you —" the kiss deepened suddenly, cutting him off, "—completely silent," he gasped when he managed to pull free enough to finish his command.

Hannibal quirked an eyebrow, clearly objecting to this. Will just pecked him quickly on the chin before slipping out from under him.

He moved quick, dodging the nimble hands that tried to keep him trapped.

Will twisted away, spinning around so he faced the doctor. He cocked an eyebrow, running a hand over his pearled necklace and then up to his ear, pushing his hair back so Hannibal could see him touching them lightly. He backed out of the kitchen while never breaking eye contact. The man was staring him down like a beast contemplating how to trap its next meal.

Too bad Will wasn't prey. "Did you really think I'd allow you to fuck me in the kitchen? Tsk-tsk, Lecter. How *classless*. "

That got Hannibal to follow.

He was stalking Will. His footsteps were dead silent. If Will wasn't watching him, he'd be doubting he was following at all.

Somehow, that only made Will grin wider, a thrill racing up and down his spine. Either the man was taking his command as an absolute, or he just walked that quietly all the time. Both were intriguing ideas. If he had to guess, he'd say it was something more in the middle. The man could walk quietly, but only did so when he wanted to. Like when he was getting ready to pounce.

It didn't take long.

They barely made it halfway up the stairs before Hannibal darted forward, snatching Will back up into his arms and hauling him in.

Will's laughter was swallowed by a moan as Hannibal's mouth latched onto his neck. Hungry and violent and reverent. That's how Hannibal was treating him. He started at the pearls, mouthing them only for a moment before he shifted higher up. He sucked on the delicate skin, turning it a rebellious red before biting down. Hard enough to leave the imprint of teeth marks and pull a high note from Will. He soothed it with loving kisses, laving his tongue over the hurt.

He gradually worked his way further up, focusing on the soft skin behind Will's ear.

Heat swirled in Will's gut, another moan leaving his gasping lips. He grabbed him by the hips and yanked him forward, shifting so Hannibal could stand between his legs. If it wasn't for the wall, they'd have tipped over. Instead, Will's back crashed into it, the pain lost amongst the burn of need.

Hannibal's hand slammed into the wall, fingertips bone white and tendons flexing.

Will pulled him till their hips were flush together. The pressure against his hardening cock made him keen. The knowledge that it was Hannibal's own hard member had him digging his fingers into his back, trying to remove the last of the space between them.

Hannibal's free hand worked its way down, grabbing him by the thigh. With a bruising force, he pulled Will's leg free and hooked it up around his hip, grinding against him mercilessly. Will couldn't stop his hips from canting up at the sensation.

Fighting to keep his composure, Will wrenched Hannibal's head back by his hair. The movement was chased by a kiss. He just couldn't get enough of his lips against Hannibal's. And he wasn't about to lose the game just yet.

Ripping himself away, Will panted as he tripped over himself to finish scaling the rest of the stairs to the first landing. The wood steps were cold under his feet. He didn't know when he'd

lost the slippers. He stopped at the top, turning to look back at a breathless and rather debauched looking Hannibal. The man's hair was sticking up at odd angles in the back, lips swollen from the abuse, and, at some point, his shirt had lost a few of its buttons.

"I told you," Will growled out, voice hoarse from the emotions crashing through him, "it's *classless.* Bedroom."

Not that he wasn't tempted to strip the man down where he was crouched over the steps. Will hadn't been the only one to lose his balance when he'd forced himself away. Even with his sophisticated suit pants on, there was an impressive tent showing itself. Those eyes made it all the more enticing. Sharp and cutting. Even more so when they caught where Will's attention was lingering.

They were the eyes of someone quickly reaching their wits in.

Before Will could back down the hall, Hannibal sprang. He grabbed Will by the waist and tossed him over his shoulder. Will found them in the bedroom, the door slamming behind them, before he'd really comprehended what'd happened.

He couldn't help but laugh. He'd always thought Hannibal to be of unending patience. But it seemed there was a limit after all. Hannibal horny was his limit. Not what he'd expected from the stubbornly patient man.

Will was still laughing when he was thrown onto the bed.

He looked at Hannibal, who was stretched out over him. He hummed, pleased at what he saw. "What? We feeling a little rushed? Maybe a little tense, hmm?"

Hannibal swallowed hard at the teasing. Will had no doubt that he would make him pay for this later. But that was a future-Will problem. Right now, he just wanted to enjoy himself.

Hannibal reached for Will's shirt, starting to pull it over his head, but his hand was slapped away. "No. You don't get to touch. Now up."

He froze at the command, jaw flexing. His fingers tightened on the shirt for a moment, but he eventually let go. Breathing hard, he haltingly did as he was told. His knees were on either side of Will's legs, but he was sitting straight up, no part of them touching. He stared hard down at Will, eyes sparking with displeasure.

He wanted Will naked.

"No. Up," Will said again, emphasizing the word.

Hannibal paused only for a moment. He pushed off the bed, standing at the foot of it. Will followed, sliding off to stand in front of Hannibal in one smooth motion. "I hope you planned for this. Otherwise, it's going to be an uncomfortable drive to the store."

Hannibal said nothing, lips pressed firmly together.

Tilting his head to the side, the pearl earrings swinging from the motion, Will said, “Well, if you have it, go get it.”

Hannibal disappeared into the bathroom, and Will took the moment to push his pants over his hips. He’d kicked them out of the way by the time Hannibal returned with an ornate wooden box.

He paused at the threshold of the bathroom, eyes running up and down Will’s bared legs. They were long and pale, but toned from having to lift unwilling dogs into the bathtub and chase them down when they made a mad dash for it at the park. His fingers tightened on the box, lines around his eyes creasing. Appreciation shone in his eyes as he leaned against the doorway, looking his fill.

A blush rushed to Will’s face. A glance in that stupid mirror showed an extremely pink face, his dark hair mussed and lips a tantalizing red. His shirt hung off to one side, exposing one shoulder. The pearls were like stars on an inverted night sky.

He fought the shyness that suddenly overtook him. His shoulders curved in just a bit, tugging at his shirt self consciously.

“Come here.” This time, the command was gentle.

Hannibal pushed off the doorway and held the box out to Will. He took it and set it on the bed without looking away from Hannibal.

He reached for what was left of the buttons of Hannibal’s shirt. Honestly, it was rather sad to see such a nice shirt ruined. Not that Will was feeling particularly guilty about it. If anything, something territorial in him was pleased at this display.

As he carefully undid the last of the button, silently pushing it off his broad shoulders, Hannibal reached out again for his shirt, no doubt to return the favor.

Again, Will knocked his hands away. “No. I told you before. You don’t touch. Stay still.”

Those fingers curled into fists, but returned to his side.

Seeing Hannibal shirtless for the first time, Will paused. He took a step back, eyes studying every inch of him. He ran his hands over him, slowly circling him. He had a scar on his side, against his ribcage. It was only a few inches long and faded to a soft white. An old scar by the looks of it. Someone had only nicked him.

Will brushed his fingers over it, his skin molten silk. Hannibal’s eyes never left him as he continued his inspection.

There was another one, uglier in color on his back. It was a dusty pink, raised, the skin twisted. It was impossible to miss against his light skin tone. The scar was close to his spine, up closer to his shoulder blades. Someone had been aiming to paralyze him. Or at least do some serious damage. It wasn’t surprising, considering his occupation, but the idea of

someone getting that close made Will lean in to press a kiss to the scar. The skin scalding under his lips.

Hannibal's heart thundered. He could almost feel it against his mouth. Will watched through lashes as the older man tilted his head back, the muscles flexing at the sudden touch. He wondered if he'd be making any noise if he hadn't given the command.

Will's own heart raced.

This close, he could see a variety of light imperfections on his back. Marks that had clearly been injuries at one point. They'd faded and smoothed over with time, practically invisible now. They were the quiet testaments of the true skin Hannibal wore. When he finally decided to remove the carefully crafted mask of a philanthrope. He may not lie to himself, but he did like to wear masks.

Another mark sat on his hip. Will knew a bullet hole when he saw one. He ran his thumb over it, feeling the raised skin. Whoever it'd been was clearly a piss poor shot. And if he ever figured out who it'd been, he'd hunt them down and return the favor.

Finishing his circle, he stopped. He met his gaze again, listening to the man breathe hard. Will felt the tension thrumming under Hannibal's skin where his palms sat on his abdomen. It was like lightning caught and bottled into someone's veins.

Slowly, very, very slowly, Will let his hands slide down. His nails scratch lightly against the soft skin of his stomach, enjoying the way the muscles jump. He only stopped when he reached the button of Hannibal's pants.

The look in Hannibal's eyes was daring him to see what happened if he stopped.

He didn't.

Popping the button free, his hands ran over Hannibal's hip, pushing his trousers down. They dropped with nothing more than a rustle to the ground. Will thought his underwear would have matched the rest of his outfit. Either his oxford red suit or pearly shirt. But instead they were a simple black pair briefs. Just like the pair he'd gotten Will.

They did nothing to hide Hannibal's straining cock.

Will hummed, running his thumb back and forth over the tip of it, understanding how painful it was to have it restricted by the material. He was suffering the same problem. Hannibal's brows twitched, body bowing forward ever so slightly. Will pressed harder, watching as a wet spot gradually formed. He didn't stop till Hannibal's forehead rested on his shoulder, breathing laborious.

Not that Will's own breathing wasn't just as hard. His stomach tightened, legs clenching together at the idea of Hannibal pushing *that* into him. It had been a long time for him.

Ducking, he bent far enough down to press a kiss to Hannibal's lips. He licked and sucked, distracting them both. Opening his eyes, Will found Hannibal's hands hovering around his

waist. He was being obedient.

Smiling into the kiss, Will pushed a hand into Hannibal's underwear.

Fuck.

Hannibal was hot, hard, and bigger than he'd expected. Will shuttered, kissing him harder as he ran his fingers gently up and down his length, measuring him out. He flicked his thumb over the tip again, feeling the precum against his skin.

Hannibal bit his lip hard. Maybe it was to keep from making noise. Maybe it was punishment. Either way, Will took pity on him. And on himself.

He pushed the underwear off so Hannibal was completely naked. "Get on your back," he gasped, maneuvering Hannibal to the bed. It was so hot. It felt like the AC wasn't running at all.

Turning his attention to the box, he moved it to the bedside table. It was a rich wood color, with a darker wood curling design around the edges. A brass latch held it close. It looked old. It could be older than the house.

Popping it open, Will was surprised. It wasn't the lube or condoms that surprised him. Those had been the only things he'd expected in the box. But the toys weren't. His eyes narrowed, not touching them. A cockring, a plug, and beads. Something nasty flashed through him at the idea of Hannibal letting anyone else see him with those on or in him. Or at the idea of sleeping with him at all.

Lifting the cockring, he twirled it around his finger, looking down at Hannibal in question.

Seeing the severe look, Hannibal's lips twisted into a smirk. His look clearly said, ' *If you wish to know, you just need to allow me to speak. I will always tell you anything you wish to know,* mylimasis .' Will could hear his voice, thick with his accent and desire, murmuring in his ear.

As much as he did want to know, he wasn't about to let him speak just yet.

He dropped the ring back into the box, pulling out the lube and condoms, snapping it closed. He didn't want to look at them while he was riding Hannibal.

He tossed both on the bed, reaching down to remove his own underwear.

His own cock was hard, angry and aching from the neglect. Fisting his shirt so it'd stop brushing over it, Will crawled onto the bed, straddling Hannibal's thighs. He couldn't handle the feeling of the silk over the hypersensitive area.

Settling carefully down, he looked down at Hannibal whose hands were clenching the comforter. His dark eyes watched every movement Will made, not missing a single thing. His usually light skin was flushed red around his neck and chest. Will itched to leave kiss marks all over him like the one he had no doubt left on his neck.

“Comfortable?”

There was no way he was comfortable. They both were desperate for relief.

Will grabbed the lube, the lid opening with a loud *pop* in the quiet room. Pouring a liberal amount into his hand, he turned to Hannibal. “Watch closely now, Dr. Lecter. So, you know what to do for future reference.”

Reaching behind him, he arched his back and tilted his hips. He shifted so his legs sat even further apart. He took his time, pushing one finger in and gradually stretching himself out. His shirt continued to brush against his cock, dampening from the precum. Unable to handle it, he stuffed the hem of it into his mouth so that it stayed out of the way. It also allowed Hannibal a clear view between his thighs.

He started to sit up, hands moving to Will’s thighs, but Will shoved him back. His look told Hannibal to stay down.

A second finger was added, scissoring and pushing even deeper.

Hannibal was big. And how they were positioned showed just how much bigger he was than Will. And Will had never been self conscious of his own size. He wasn’t particularly thick in his own opinion, but his was long, curved just slightly up. Hannibal’s was thick and long.

He added a third finger, breath hitching and brows furrowing. The sound of his fingers pushing in wetly filled the room. It made Will’s gut clench, his thighs tightening as he fought to relax.

He was still moving too fast. It’d been long enough that he should be taking more time. He should be more careful with himself. But he wanted. Goddamn he *wanted.* He wanted to feel Hannibal in him and all around him. Just the idea of it made his cock jerk. He could almost feel it.

Hannibal’s gaze burned him everywhere it touched. His fingers had wrapped so tightly in the comforter it had been ripped off the edges of the bed. It was inching its way to the middle of the bed where they laid.

Will closed his eyes, lashes fluttering as he tried not to think about how closely he was being watched. How every inch of him was on display. Shame and excitement was thrumming through him in equal measures. He tried to touch that one spot that felt good. But this angle didn’t allow him to reach it easily. His other hand dragged up his stomach, pulling at his nipple before moving further up so he could touch his earrings.

He was breathing hard, trying to focus on getting himself ready. A finger brushed over that spot and a moan, frustrated and low, vibrated out of him. He tossed his head back, feeling the sweat bead on his temple. It was itching its way down his face, down to his neck.

He should be ready.

Pulling his fingers free, slick and lube coated them.

Panting, he grabbed a condom and let go of his shirt. Will ripped it open with his teeth.

He bent over Hannibal, whose body crackled with energy, brushing a kiss back and forth over his lips. He rolled the condom on him, tugging on his cock a few times. He couldn't stop himself.

Will pulled back just enough to ask, "Ready?"

The fire in Hannibal's eyes was answer enough.

He didn't sit up, and instead kept close enough to feel each breath Hannibal took as he poured lube onto Hannibal's cock. He grabbed it, shifting his seated position so he pulled himself further up. He now hovered right over Hannibal's hips, rather than his thighs.

Slowly, he lowered himself, refusing to break eye contact with Hannibal no matter how much embarrassment was beginning to creep into him. He wanted to see Hannibal's reaction for every moment of it.

The tip was always the hardest part. He pushed down, having to sit up a little to angle it right.

His gasp filled the room, eyes widening as it breached him.

Big. Fuck. It felt so fucking big.

The arm propping him up shook, and his spine arched unbidden at the sensation. He bit his lip hard, swallowing the noises that wanted to break out of him. He couldn't break yet.

Breathing hard, Will looked down at Hannibal to see his face twisted. It was the face of someone being tortured.

A crooked grin twisted Will's face. It was enough to have him gasp, "Well? How's it feel Mr. Mafia Boss?"

Hannibal looked ready to kill. Or maybe just pound him into the sheets.

Will pushed back, even as his body protested at the intrusion. He really should have prepped longer. But, even as he found himself gasping for breath, pain and bliss ricocheting through him, he kept pushing down. He wanted to feel all of Hannibal in him.

It took time, and some breaks, but eventually, finally Will could feel Hannibal's hip pressed snug against him. Sweat dripped down his back, dotting his throat and collar. "Holy shit." The word was breathless as Will pushed himself up into a seated position, tilting his hips, testing the fit. "Fuck Ha—mmmmmhn."

He bit the back of his hand to keep from saying his name. Not yet.

Hannibal's hands had torn through the comforter. Will didn't want to know how much strength it would have taken to do that. Or how he hadn't managed to hear it ripping.

Instead, he kept his hand stuffed in his mouth as he leaned back to brace a hand on Hannibal's thigh. The movement pushed Hannibal's cock even deeper. Both of them shuttered, trying to catch their breath.

After a minute, Will started to move, flexing and shifting his hips, trying to find the right rhythm. He took his time, trying out different angles and different speeds. He watched Hannibal's expressions closely, cataloging when he did things that felt good for him. Hannibal watched him just as closely.

The feeling of Hannibal's cock sliding in and out of him was distracting. As was the wet *shlicking* noise filling the room and heaving breaths. It was enough to burn the back of Will's neck.

Will's brows twisted, pulling his hips up and dropping down harder this time. This time, it hit the spot that made his hips go weak. Sparks flared in his gut, twisting up his spine. There. That was it.

Hannibal hadn't missed it.

This time when Will dropped his hips, Hannibal shoved his up. His aim was dead on.

A keen broke out of Will. No, no, no. He wasn't going to break yet.

He looked down at Hannibal, hands bracing against his chest for leverage. He rocked harder, making sure to twist and tighten in such a way that Hannibal's face tightened, throat swallowing to keep from making any noise. Sweat had broken out of his skin.

Bending down, never stopping his movement, Will kissed and licked his chest. Hands grabbed at Will's hair. He grabbed Hannibal's wrists and shoved them up above his head. "No."

The word was snarled through clenched teeth into Hannibal's skin as Will tried to keep going. He was close to breaking, but not yet. He could hold out a little longer.

He bit Hannibal's chest, right over his nipple. The man couldn't stop his hips from slamming up into Will. Will's cock ached for relief. It was agony every time he pushed down. It kept hitting Hannibal's stomach, stimulating it. Precum was drooling from the tip. His fingers twitched around Hannibal's wrists, wanting to touch.

He moved his way up to his neck, and the pearls of his necklace brushing Hannibal's skin. A stark contract of cool against burning hot. He sucked at the skin, nibbling gently, moving up to Hannibal's mouth.

They kissed, though it was more of open mouths meeting than kissing. Their tongues twisted together, teeth biting, and lips sucking at one another.

Another hard thrust that had Will seeing stars did him in. "Ha—nnibal, gods Hannibal."

He hadn't even realized he'd said his name till his world spun. He keened when Hannibal pulled out of him, the feeling of emptiness remaining, and he found himself on his stomach,

sprawled out under the mafia boss. He panted, disoriented as he tried to clear the fog from his brain.

His hands reached out in front of him, clenching the blue sheet. He turned his head so he could look over his shoulder to Hannibal. He found a predator looking down at him. One hand gripped the back of his thigh, holding him still, while the other flattened against his back, pushing him into an arch. Excitement raged through him at the touch.

Hannibal leaned down over him, nosing his ears. His breath was hot against his skin. “I hope you have prepared yourself for what you’ve done.”

Will couldn’t even grin before Hannibal had slammed back into him.

Gods, it felt so good. Hannibal knew just how to angle his thrust, just how much force to use, to make Will see stars.

When he reached down to jerk himself off, Hannibal grabbed at his hands and pinned them over his head, mirroring what Will had done. “Only I get to bring you pleasure.”

Will grabbed at the pillows, pushing his facing into them, trying to muffle his cries. Hannibal’s hands flicked up and down his body, lighting him up with every touch. His shirt was shoved up, so it bunched around his neck. It was suffocating. He wanted to rip it off, but knew he’d face plant if he tried. Hot lips traced his spine, moving to the newly discovered wolf tattoo. A tongue ran over it, teeth finding it next. Hannibal was leaving his own marks over Will.

He didn’t show any mercy.

His thrusted into Will hard and fast, his hips pistoning. Will couldn’t recover his breath, drool and tears staining the pillow. When Hannibal grabbed his cock, causing him to jerk up, a cry ripped from him. But the scream was silenced by a hand over his mouth.

He was hauled up to his knees, back pressed to Hannibal’s front. His heart thundered, breath rattling in his chest. He grabbed Hannibal by the hair, turning his head so their cheeks pressed together. It was the only thing he could think to hold onto in this position. A whine leaked out of him. Pleasure lit him up as Hannibal tugged at his weeping cock.

Lips pressed to his neck. “The only sound you’re allowed to make is my name, William. Do you understand?”

It took Will a minute to process what he said. His mouth hung open, heaving as he tried to catch his breath. It was hard to think with Hannibal still pushing in and out of him, his hand still on his cock sending waves of pleasure through him.

“William,” he called, giving a particular hard thrust, stilling when he’d reached the farthest depths.

Will choked, eyes flaring wide. He nodded again and again. Hannibal released his mouth to wrap an arm around his waist, hand pressing into his lower abdomen.

“Good boy,” Hannibal murmured, kissing his damp hair as he started ramming into him again.

The sound of slapping skin and kisses filled the room. Hannibal was leaving marks over Will’s shoulders and neck, never letting up from his punishing pace. He was pushing Will to the edge. It wouldn’t be much longer till he was pushed over. If Hannibal didn’t have a grip around him, he would have already slumped back over onto the bed.

Will kept one hand in Hannibal’s hair, but the other grabbed at the hand on his stomach, digging his nails into the forearm. The hand left his stomach, crawling up his chest, to his mouth. Two fingers shoved into his mouth, just shallow enough that Will didn’t choke on them.

“Ha-nig-al.”

“Mm,” Hannibal answered, burying his nose into Will’s curls.

Will’s stomach tensed, the heat building low in his gut. He was going to cum soon.

“Did I watch closely enough, William?” he asked, the words curled the teasing. “Is this the right spot?” he asked, purposefully missing. “Or here?” A different spot. Will gagged and shook his head fiercely. “Or was it—” a hard shove of his hips so his cock hit the perfect spot, ripping a cry from Will, “here?”

Hannibal smiled, making sure to ram his cock into the same spot a few more times.

With his fingers still in his mouth, Hannibal used them to direct Will’s head so he was looking at that damn box. “Does it bother you, William?” he asked, wet lips against his temple, a smile curling at the corners. His breath washed over his skin. “Does it drive you crazy to think of me using those as I bed someone else?”

Will bit down hard on his fingers in answer.

Hannibal laughed, kissing what skin he could. “Do you wish to hunt them down? Erase them from existence?” He never stopped driving into him. If anything, he’d slowed down just enough so that with every push, he hit Will just right to light him up. “Peel their skin from their bones and tattoo their transgressions into the ivory?”

“Ha—” A hard yank on his cock cut off his words.

The fingers that weren’t in his mouth wrapped around his jaw. Laughter was pushed into his skin as his head was tilted back. “Do you have any idea how much I would reveal in watching you stake your claim? Do you know how beautiful you would be bathed in the blood of your victory?”

Even in sex, Hannibal talked too much. Will’s brain was too fried to catch most of it.

The pleasure was building and building. “Ha—” he couldn’t talk around the fingers. He wanted to warn him that he was about to cum. It wouldn’t be much longer. “Hah—”

More kisses on his neck and jaw. On the necklace and earrings. “Don’t worry, *mylimasis*. Those were bought specially for you.” Teeth tugged on his earrings. “I would never soil your sight or trust with such atrocities as things like that. I have many plans for us. Here and other places. I have had a long, long time to consider all the places I want you. My own personal feast to spread out and take at my leisure.”

Will groaned, eyes slamming shut, trying to hear him over the roar of his blood. He dug his nails deeper into Hannibal’s skin, which had quickly grown slippery with sweat. They were both drenched in it. They slid seamlessly against one another in perfect sync. “My own. I will not share you with anyone. Not even a morsel. If I find even one of your past lovers,” the words were whispered, dark and possessive, “I will gut them and serve you their hearts in the most divine sauce. It will be perfectly cooked, tender and delicious, with just enough juice left for it to run dark down your chin as you bite down. Like Eve’s forbidden fruit.”

Fingers moved over the sensitive head of his cock, before dropping down to cup him between his legs.

“I would string them up for the city to see. They would bear no fingers, no hearts, no faces, and no genitals. Anything that touched you would be removed.” A violent promise. “I would wipe them from every history book. No one would ever know who they were before I found them. Nameless, faceless, heartless warnings.”

Hannibal’s fingers pulled from his mouth, saliva stringing between Will’s lips and his hand. “Hannibal!”

It was the only thing he could say.

“Cum, William.”

And that’s all it took. Will’s eyes rolled back in his head, back arching as pleasure exploded in him. White stained his sweat soaked silk shirt. His mouth opened, but no noise came out. It was a tortured, blissful silent scream.

Hannibal was quick to follow, biting into Will’s neck as he came. They slumped over on the bed. Hannibal didn’t bother pulling out right away. His arms wrapped tighter around Will, letting him take his full weight. Heat radiated in waves from them, sweat riveting down their skin and soaking into the bed.It wasn’t the only thing either.

There was a sticky mess clinging to Will’s stomach and smearing into the comforter.

It took a minute for Will’s brain to come back in line. He blinked, mouth open as he breathed hard. His skin buzzed from sensitivity. His mind was already starting to spin again. Already running back over every moment, every touch, every word they’d just shared. It didn’t take long for him to figure out what was lingering in the back of his mind.

Fuck.

His hand fumbled around till he found a pillow, grumbling into the sheet. His arms shook trying to lift it. He weakly smacked Hannibal with it. The man could have been dead for how

much he reacted to it. “You—” hard breath “—bastard.”

That got a twitch out of him, but he still didn’t pull his head away from where it was buried into Will’s neck. He seemed to be enjoying his spot over him.

“Did you really think *now* was the best time to tell me you eat people?”

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

Honestly, would someone explain to me how my this chapter, out of all the damn chapters, is the longest one??? Hopefully that means it passes inspection haha

Boundaries & Patience

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal talk

Chapter Notes

Yo, we broke 100K word count. Look at that. You fanfic gremlins have now read a whole full-ass book. Impressive.

TW: mentions of manipulative past, fluff

Hannibal is a bit of fluff monster in this chapter

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As much as Will wanted to hit him with a pillow again, and go another round, his body couldn't do either. The combination of not eating regular meals, not having slept all night, the stress of catching Freddie, and then getting fucked halfway to next Tuesday ended up being too much.

He passed out moments after hitting Hannibal.

He slept. And slept. And slept.

When he managed to pry his eyes open, his eyes feeling sewn shut and mouth dry, he wasn't sure what time it was. Or even if it was still the same day.

He was curled on his side, cleaned and dressed in black sleepwear. Even the comforter had been changed to a bronze one at some point. He ran a hand over the top of it, the fabric cool under his touch. The pillow he buried his head in was wonderfully squishy. Much better than the flatten rock he'd been sleeping on for years.

Blinking, he lifted his head to look around the room.

A glass of water was the first thing he saw. It sat on the nightstand next to him, along with his gun. He supposed he should feel annoyed that had Hannibal had waited till he was sure Will wouldn't shoot him to give it back, but he was frankly too comfortable to feel much of anything except sleepy.

The curtains were drawn tight, all doors closed, so that no light snuck in.

He moved for the water, pushing the covers back to sit up. His body protested from the movement. Damn. He was more sore than he'd anticipated. There were even some fingerprints beginning to show up on his wrists and arms. There was no telling what the rest of him looked like.

Sighing, he swung his feet over the edge of the bed. But when he went to get up, he found himself yanked back under the covers. Heat engulfed his back, arms snaking tightly around his waist to keep him from moving. Heavy legs entwined with his. A nose nuzzled into his neck, Hannibal's breath soft and even against his skin.

Will never thought of himself as the little spoon.

He patted Hannibal's arm, trying to get the man to loosen his hold. If anything, he just made him wrap himself more tightly around Will.

"Hannibal," Will said, his voice rough. His throat itched and mouth felt full of sandpaper. He tapped at the arms again. "Hannibal. I need some water."

That got him a grunt, but nose only buried deeper into his skin.

"I'm also hot." A lie. The room was chilly. Being right against Hannibal under the sheets was the perfect temperature for sleeping.

The man didn't seem interested in moving anytime soon.

"I need to check the time too. Bev will be expecting me at the shop today." Not that she'd happily give him the entire week off if she even suspected that he'd slept with Hannibal.

Hannibal hummed. It vibrated over Will's skin, little shocks sparking through him.

Sighing, Will said to the ceiling, "I'm hungry."

That worked. There was a pause, and then the arms released him, hands squeezing his waist before disappearing. It wasn't that he wasn't hungry. Just that he really wanted to sit up. And they needed to have a few conversations anyway. He hadn't forgotten about Hannibal's poorly timed admission.

He pulled himself up, hands landing on his back helping him.

Hannibal was already up, eyes running over him. He was wearing the same colored pajamas as Will. His eyes lingered over Will's neck, before raising back to his face."How are you feeling?" he asked, accent thick and words sleepy. It was an intoxicating sound. Not to mention the man looked soft from sleep, lips still swollen and hair mussed.

Clearing his throat, Will turned away to grab the glass of water. He took his time, trying to collect his thoughts.

"Sore."

It was true. His lower back and hips ached. It hurt a little to sit up. He'd need to take ibuprofen or something to help. The idea of sitting on a stool, bent over a tattoo was agonizing. He should probably buy some cheap heating pads or ice packs at a convenience store before going in. His neck hurt too. But he suspected if he looked in the mirror, he'd find the cause to be teeth and kiss marks.

Hannibal was up and disappearing into the bathroom before he'd finished the thought.

He returned with a white bottle, tipping some of the pills into Will's hand. "Take another two in four to six hours if you need them. They're in the cupboard on the left side of the bathroom mirror."

Will tossed them back, swallowing them dry. "I should take some with me to work then."

Hannibal eyed him, eyebrow twitching. "William, what time do you think it is?"'

Will looked at him, and then around the room. He honestly had no idea. He'd left his phone in the kitchen. "No sure, why?"

Hannibal's lips twitched in amusement. He set the bottle on the nightstand next to Will's gun. "It's two am."

Fuck. No wonder Hannibal hadn't wanted to get up. It was the middle of the night.

"Oh."

He rubbed his face, beard stubble catching on his callouses. He couldn't believe he slept that long. It was easily over twelve hours. And frankly, he could easily go back to sleep. But, now that he was awake, his mind was buzzing. There were certainly a few things they needed to discuss before going back to sleep. Otherwise, Will would end up staying awake the rest of the night, mind whirling.

"Um, so what did you do then?" He couldn't imagine Hannibal having slept the entire day with him.

"I took care of you." Will refused to blush at the implication. He'd never had someone take care of him after sex. "Cleaned up the kitchen." Will had forgotten about the food. "I then had some appointments this afternoon I needed to attend to." Hannibal tucked his hands behind his back, running another critical eye over him. With a long rest, Will's skin color was better and the circles under his eyes weren't as dark. "And I called Ms. Foster to let her know about your absence."

Feeling guilty, Will tugged at his earrings. He hadn't meant to pass out like that. Or sleep that long.

Seeing his expression, Hannibal said softly, "You were exhausted, William. Your sleep schedule has been rather poor, so it is not surprising it finally caught up to you." Hannibal paused, and then pointedly added, "As has your eating. It is lucky you didn't collapse."

The mention of food had Will's stomach growling. The eggs had long disappeared from his system.

Hannibal's eyes lit up at the sound. "You need sustenance."

"Right food," Will muttered, leaning back on his hands as he looked Hannibal over. "I think we should have a talk about that before I eat anything else from you."

An eyebrow quirked. "Very well. Shall we move to the kitchen?"

———

Neither of them said anything for a while after that. They sat in comfortable silence as Hannibal cooked. Food littered the island, but it was the tub of ground meat that caught Will's attention. Now knowing Hannibal's proclivities, he had a sneaky suspicion that he knew exactly what kind of meat it was.

Will shifted on his bar stool. His body twinged with the movement. Even taking the medicine hadn't removed all his soreness. He ran a finger around the edge of his glass, thoughtful. Hannibal hummed where he stood on the other side of the counter, dicing carrots and celery. He was loose limbed and relaxed. Completely comfortable.

The smell of spices and butter wafted through the air from where it simmered along with onions and bell peppers on the stove.

Will took a sip of his water, eyes sharp on those long fingers moving along the edge of the knife. "I suppose we should talk about some things," he said slowly, hooking his slippered feet on the footrest on the stool.

Burgundy eyes flashed up and then back down. "If you would like, William. What is on that boundless mind of yours?" He was teasing. Even though his expression didn't give it away, Will could hear it in the lilt of his words. He knew exactly what Will wanted to talk about.

"How about the fact you like to feed me people."

"Hmm." More chopping, the silver knife flashing under the kitchen lights. "Rest assured, you are fed only the best."

Will snorted, rubbing his face. "I don't think that's the point."

"Enlighten me, *mylimasis.* " The tone was all play. A small smirk lingered at the corners of his mouth.

"Hannibal." Will's tone was chiding. He wanted him to be serious. The man was all too chuffed with himself, too pleased with how everything had turned out, to be stoic at the moment.

"Dearest William."

Will drug a hand through his hair, pulling at the curls. "For Christ's—"

Hannibal ignored his muttering as he added the chopped vegetables into the pan. It hissed, popping and sizzling in anger. The ground meat went in next.

“Shouldn’t you ask me permission before feeding me other people?” Will asked, crossing his arms. Though, by this point, he wasn’t sure it really mattered. He just felt like he’d be letting the doctor off too easily if they didn’t talk about it. Or the fact that it wasn’t exactly considered okay to be a cannibal. Then again, killing people as a profession fell into the same category. “Did you consider I might not be okay with that?”

“Does eating people bother you, Will? Or is it that it *doesn’t* bother you as much as you think it should that bothers you?”

Leave it to Hannibal to actually point out the problem. Because Will knew it should bother him. He was eating others. And while it did to an extent, it really didn’t.

Will cocked his head to the side, eyes narrowing. Hannibal stirred the contents of the pan. “What if I said I wasn’t okay with it? What would you do then?” he asked, purposefully pushing at the man. His ability to remain unruffled was infuriating.

Hannibal looked at him, expression tight. There was something anxious about it. “Would you ask me to change?”

“No.”

The answer was out before Hannibal had even finished asking. Will’s fingers curled in, pinching at the fabric of his shirt. There was no way Will would demand that. He had tried for years to do that. The idea of inflicting that on Hannibal hadn’t even crossed his mind.

Hannibal read that on his face. His expression softened. He lowered the heat of the stove, wiping his hands on a towel as he approached Will. He leaned on the counter, reaching across the space to take his hands. He brought Will’s hand towards himself, pressing his lips to his palms. “Very well. What is it you are asking then?”

Will swallowed. His gaze sat on the chest pocket of Hannibal’s sleep shirt. It had an white embroidered HL in curving letters.

What was he asking? To know everything Hannibal did? To be told every little secret? For Hannibal to listen to every one of his whims or wants? None of those really fit.

“Honesty. And boundaries.”

He wanted the truth when he asked something. He didn’t want to be misled or lied to. And when he said no, he wanted Hannibal to listen to him. Not to trick him into doing what he wanted. Will knew he could do it. The man was smart enough, he could probably get anyone to do what he wanted without them ever realizing it was under his influence. And with Will’s empathy, and his attachment, it would be easy enough to guide him in the direction he wanted.

Will didn't want to be influenced or controlled by anyone. He wanted to make decisions based on his own reasoning. Not because his empathy made him do it.

Hannibal watched him steadily. "I am always honest with you."

"Sometimes. If you don't want me to know, you let me draw the wrong conclusions."

Hannibal's lips quirked, but his eyes were serious. "I am afraid it is an occupational hazard."

Will laughed, rubbing his thumb over Hannibal's cheekbone. He could understand. He did the same thing with people at the shop. If he didn't want them to know, he'd just let them draw the wrong conclusion. Or gave them just enough information for them to get it wrong.

"That's okay. We can work on it."

Hannibal leaned over the counter, keeping Will's hand pressed to his face. He was enjoying the skinship. "Do you wish for me to cook you something else?"

Did Will want him to not feed him people?

"I don't know."

Hannibal carefully watched his face. "What do you want, William?"

Will didn't say anything. He wasn't sure. Boundaries is what he'd said. But, he wasn't sure what to ask for. He didn't even know what he could ask for.

His mind dipped back to when he'd been friends with Chilton.

Sensing the change, Hannibal asked, "You may ask me for anything."

Will chuckled weakly. "Would you do anything I asked?"

"As long as I felt it did not harm you in some way."

Curling his fingers in Hannibal's, he tugged at his hand till he could press the back of Hannibal's hand to his forehead. Talk. They needed to talk. And not just about Hannibal's eating habits. In some ways, that was the easier of the two things. It was clear cut and easy to pick out.

What they needed to talk about were the landmines that had been planted in Will's mind after years of betrayal and mistrust. These were things that even he might not know about himself. And things he didn't know how to handle.

Will spoke quietly, his eyes tightly shut, hand squeezing Hannibal's. "Don't use my empathy against me. Don't write about me. Don't talk to me like a prized subject with other psychiatrists. Don't lie to me about how you see me. Don't—" he had to take a shaky breath "—don't use me as a stepping stone. Don't use my feelings just as a means to an end."

Hysteria sat in the back of his throat, choking him. In some ways, Hannibal would have every right to be offended by what he was saying. It could be taken as Will assuming the worst in him. Even when he hadn't given him a reason to.

But for Will, he didn't want any ambiguity. He didn't want to hear the words "if you had just told me" or "if there was a problem you should have said so" or "how was I supposed to know." He didn't want ignorance to be used as an excuse again. Things said to mislead him into thinking things had been said or done without the intention of hurt. No, "I'm sorry but" or "if I'd only known."

"What else?"

Will jerked up, blue meeting red. Anger. There was something sinister in those eyes.

"What else, *mylimasis* ?"

Pitch black lingered in those words. A poisonous promise. And it wasn't directed at Will.

"Tell me, William."

Will could see it. Chilton flayed open, an apple stuffed in his mouth, as his empty insides were shown to the world. As he brainless cranium was documented for everyone to see. Hannibal would show his innermost self, like Chilton had tried to do to Will. He would humiliate him and degrade him in the worst ways.

Will shot across the counter, fast as an adder. He grabbed Hannibal by the shoulders and wrapped himself around his neck, pushing Hannibal's head into his neck. Will's body throbbed at the movement, his hips and ass protesting about sitting on a hard surface. "No, Hannibal. No, no. It's okay. It's okay."

Chilton was a prominent figure. And Hannibal hadn't been discreet showing up around Will's store. He stuck out like a sore thumb. And what was worse was that he was memorable. A number of clients had seen Hannibal coming and going. With Will being on the No Harm's List, he feared it wouldn't take too much thinking to put two-and-two together if something happened to Chilton. He wasn't about to let something happen to Hannibal. Will had just found him.

Hands wrapped around him, pulling in close.

"Do you really think I would allow him to continue walking around unpunished?" Hannibal asked against Will's pearl necklace. "Did you think I was unaware of the harm he caused you? With how retreated you are, how could I not guess that he had used you in some way in order to publish that half-baked article? Or with how much you distrusted me as a psychiatrist?"

Will held him tighter, pulling his knees under him so he could lift himself a little higher. He was almost bending over Hannibal, like he could shield him. Lips pressed hot against the underside of his jaw.

“Do you really believe I will allow you to endure that without him reaping what he’s sown?”

“You can’t. Hannibal, you can’t. They could catch you.”

Those lips twisted into an unseen smile. “Do you think there is a single soul in this city that would dare to touch me?”

“Your identity would be exposed.”

Silence. The hands around Will’s waist dug into his skin. Rage burned uncontrolled under Hannibal’s skin.

There was no way Will would be able to get him to not go after Chilton. But, “Just wait. Wait till we know who’s after me. Then we can go after Chilton. Just be patient.” With the identity unknown of the person still chasing Will, Hannibal’s name needed to stay hidden. They could be anyone on the street. If they knew that Hannibal was the Cheaspake Ripper, it would be easy for them to slip between the cracks to get to him. They could dress as a delivery man. An ordinary person in the grocery store. A cop. A Ripper member. It was too risky for Hannibal to become known at the moment. It was clear they were too reckless or too powerful to bother with listening to rules.

They’d have no issue trying to remove Hannibal to get to Will.

Nibbling at his jaw startled Will. He pulled away to find Hannibal beaming up at him.

Seeing his confused look, the man practically purred, “We? I would be honored to have you join me.”

The goddamn man had gotten distracted. Will scowled down at him. Which got him kissed senseless.

Yanking away, Will glared down at him. “Hannibal—”

“Yes, dear William?”

Will’s eyes narrowed at him.

Hannibal pecked him lightly on the lips and then nipped at him. “Do not trouble yourself, *mylimasis*. I can be a very patient man when the reward is worth it.” He then pulled away, humming to himself as he focused back on cooking.

Will sat there, stunned, with his legs still tucked under him. Clearing his throat, he moved so that his legs swung over the edge. He didn’t know whether to move back to the stool or just stay where he was. As he debated with himself, he realized the food in the pans looked familiar. But where?

Thinking back, it didn’t take him long to remember. Pinching the bridge of his nose, he let out an exasperated breath. “When were you going to tell me that the food Molly has been bringing me was actually cooked by you?”

He’d been eating people for a lot longer, and a lot more often, then he ever realized.

The fucking cannibal gave him a pleased look. “I never hid it. You just never asked.”

Will wished he had a pillow to hit him with.

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

> Will may be worried what Hannibal is going to do to Chilton, but honestly, I'm more worried about Bev. She might die from shock and excitement when she finds out Will finally got laid.

The Unexpected

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal talk about his neck. And Bev has a surprise for him at work.

Chapter Notes

Time to see Bev's reaction

Not beta read

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will made Hannibal take him home the next day. As much as the man had tried to persuade him to stay longer, Will wanted to check on his dogs even with Hannibal assuring him that he'd had Bev look in on them. Will was sure that she would jump him the minute he stepped back in the shop. He also had a shift at *Royale* that he needed to get ready for.

Hannibal tried to talk him into quitting that job.

"I need it to pay for dog food."

Hannibal kept a hold of Will's hand the entire drive back to his apartment. "I can help with that if that is the case."

"And what makes you think I'd let you pay for my animals?"

"Because I'm your lover, and I want to provide for you."

It'd taken Will a minute to respond to that. "I don't need you to spoil me."

"But I like to."

"For the love of—" the man liked pushing Will.

In the end, they'd reached an impasse. Will wouldn't quit his second job. Hannibal wouldn't not spoil him.

They'd also had an argument, or discussion in Hannibal's words, about the state of Will's neck.

When he'd gone to the bathroom to clean up before climbing back in Hannibal's bed, he'd found it decorated in reds, blues, and purples. There were even purple rings of teeth imprints on either side of his neck, though they hadn't broken skin.

He stood stunned, leaning in to get a better view of it. Running a hand over it, the skin was irritable and puffy from the havoc Hannibal had wreaked on it. From where the pearls sat all the way up to behind his ear the skin was discolored.

But the bite marks were unmistakable.

"Hannibal!"

He didn't need to scream. The man had already been lingering in the doorway, watching the way Will's fingers curled around his throat. The way the muscles in his neck twisted and stretched as he inspected the damage.

"Mm?" Hannibal answered, entering silently. He took his place right behind Will, his hand joining Will's at his throat.

"What did you do to my neck?" A stupid question, but he didn't know what else to ask. It looked like he'd been mauled by an animal. How was he supposed to hide it when it was that extensive? "How many times did you bite me?"

Twice at least.

"Did you not like it?"

Will's mouth snapped shut. He twisted to stare at the man a good long moment. "I think we need to next talk about your refusal to answer a question directly."

Hannibal chuckled, rubbing a thumb over one of the bites. "I'm afraid I can't tell you how many times. You had me a bit distracted at the time." His eyes ran over the marks, gently titling Will's head this way and that. "Do they hurt?"

"Not too bad. Only if I touch them. Otherwise I don't notice them."

Hannibal hummed, letting him go. "I can give you an ointment to apply to them in the morning."

Will turned back to the mirror, frowning. "How am I supposed to hide these?" It was too damn hot for a turtle neck or a hoodie. And a hoodie wouldn't sit up high enough on his neck anyway. He knew there were brands of makeup that were used to cover tattoos for job interviews, but it wasn't like he had any. He worked in a diner and tattoo shop.

Hannibal had gone quiet at his remark. He continued to watch Will worry over the marks.

It took Will a second to catch his expression in the mirror. "What's wrong?"

Hannibal's lips pursed, the skin around his eyes tightening just slightly. It was the look of discontent. At Will's question, his face smoothed out. Instead, his fingers reached out to toy

with the ends of Will's hair that stuck up in every direction. "Is there a particular reason you think you should hide them?"

Ah. Hannibal was possessive. And proud.

He was always proud of his work, from his killing to the marks on Will's skin. He was probably even preening at the idea of showing Will off and letting everyone know they were together. It seemed that he thought Will wanted to keep them a secret. Like he was ashamed of them.

Twisting around, Will raised an eyebrow at him, tugging on Hannibal's sleep shirt for emphasis. "How do you expect me to get work done tomorrow when Bev is going to be pestering the hell out of me for details? She has a damn bet on how long it would take for me to sleep with you, so you can be sure she's going to want to know details."

Hannibal blinked, surprise rippling across his face. And then he huffed a laugh, expression clearing like the sky after a severe storm. He clearly hadn't expected that to be the reason for Will wanting to hide them.

"And when she sees there," he said, jabbing a finger at the marks, "she'll get started talking about kinks. Which will get Zeller and Price going in some argument about kinks or foreplay or fetishes. And while she is one of the closest people I have, I do not want to talk about my love life with her."

Hannibal smiled, kissing his forehead. "Sorry *mylimasis,* but it seems you will have to endure it."

Will looked him up and down. "Is this going to be a regular thing? Leaving marks for people to see?"

False innocence looked back at him.

"Hannibal. No. I do not want to be covered in bruises all the time because you can't control yourself."

"So, as long as you can easily cover them, you are amenable to the idea?"

Will hesitated. This felt like a trick question. "I didn't say that."

"Are you ashamed?"

"No."

"Then I believe that others' opinions should not rest so heavily on you."

"It's not about strangers, it's about my friends. You know, the people who are willing and looking for ways to make fun of me relentlessly?" Will countered, not letting Hannibal wiggle his way out of this one. "It's about the fact I like to keep my private life private."

“Then what about the fact that I like for people to be fully and unmistakably aware that you are mine and I am yours? After all, did you not leave your own marks on me?” he pointed out. Will had left a bite mark on his chest, and some red patches on his neck.

Will blushed hard enough that he gave up on the conversation altogether and went to bed. He could feel Hannibal’s silent laughter when he’d crawled under the covers right after him and pulled him close.

In the end, Hannibal was probably not going to stop leaving marks on him where people could easily see them. Will figured he just had two months max before he could wear turtle necks without drawing too much attention. For now, he’d just have to suffer the chaotic and shameless storm that was his co-workers.

Thankfully, no one at *Royale* even looked twice at him for the most part. Except Jack and a few of the customers.

His shift had been hell. Enough so that Will was second guessing his stubbornness. Jack had yelled at him the minute he stepped in the door. He was yelling at everyone else too. Apparently three of the workers had quit right before showing up to their shift. He was ranting about unprofessionalism and people being ungrateful, getting in their faces and jabbing fingers at them.

Will just happened to walk in at a bad time.

It also led to Jack pointing out his neck that was clearly seeable with his black crewneck tee. “What the fuck makes you think that’s professional to show up to work with? I don’t give a damn what you do outside work hours, but you should at least not walk in looking like a two-bit hooker when you come here. What if you attract the wrong customers? This is a family establishment, Will. Get your fucking act together.”

Will made a mental note to never let Jack near Hannibal. The man wouldn’t make it two minutes before the mafia boss would kill him.

The restaurant had been busy, and with three people short, Will had been forced to juggle washing dishes and cleaning tables. He supposed he should just be grateful Jack hadn’t forced him to wait on tables too. He already got enough stares because of his neck. He didn’t want to try and talk to people while pretending he didn’t notice them staring at his neck.

Damn Hannibal.

When he managed to get his *Wolf Trap,* he was ready to snap at the neck person he caught staring at him. Regardless of why they were staring.

Winston was the first to greet him.

He was doing a happy dance, his paws tapping excited against the floor. He’d missed his human. He’d never had to go so long without seeing him. It was his first time since the accident he was back in the shop.

“Hey boy,” Will greeted, bending down to accept kisses to the face and concerned sniffing. He ignored the protest in his hips at the movement. He gave Winston a good rub down.

Looking around, he was grateful to find the waiting room empty. He could hear the distinct whir of a tattoo gun. He hoped it was Bev.

Molly was frowning at her computer.

“Problem?” he asked, standing up and moving to lean over the front desk. He peered at the computer to find a calendar pulled up. A picture of a young boy was her desktop background.

She sighed. It was the sound of a parent at her wits end. “I’m just trying to schedule a doctor's appointment for Wally. He needs to have a physical before school starts so he can play sports. But, all the available doctor appointments aren't for almost two months. And it’s during our work hours. They can put me on a call list, in case someone cancels, but that means I might be forced to leave in the middle of a shift.”

“That won’t be a problem. Just let one of us know if that happens.”

Molly dropped her head in her hands, shaking it. “The problem is that I don’t have a car. And the clinic that’s the cheapest because I don’t have health insurance is an hour and a half away. I can’t rent one. There’s a chance one won’t be available and it would take time to get things lined out. Plus I don’t have the money for that. So, I plan on borrowing my mothers, but she lives an hour away in the opposite direction. So, I just planned to get it the morning the day of. But I can’t do that if they call me about a cancellation.”

Will tugged at his earrings. Winston wormed his way between Will’s legs and the counter, sitting on his feet. “Is it likely they’ll call with a same-day appointment opening?”

“I don’t know,” Molly groaned, finally looking up at him. “But, I’m driving myself crazy with all the what-if scenarios. It’s like my brain is trying—”

She froze. Her eyes went wide. They were glued to his neck.

Running a hand over the marks, Will cleared his throat.“I’m sure one of us can lend you a car if that happens.”

“Uh.” There was a steady blush creeping up Molly’s face.

Pretending that this wasn’t happening, Will rapped his knuckles on the counter. “Don’t worry about it. We’ll make sure you can get there. We take care of our own.” When she didn’t respond, he said, “Do I have any appointments today?”

“Uh, yeah,” she stuttered, jerking her attention back to the computer. Even her ears were red. “I mean, yes. At three with a first-timer, Miss Everlin. It’s just a consult though. And then one at six, a continuation on an arm sleeve with Mr. Petrov. After that, your slots are free.”

“Okay. If there are any walk-ins, have them—”

“Holy fucking shit.”

Bev.

She hadn’t been the one with the appointment.

Both Winston and Will turned to see the lithe woman standing shell shocked in the hallway, hand on the handle of her closed tattoo room. She wore a black shirt with a white smiley face on it. It was tucked into high-waisted green cargo pants that had dirt on the knees. There was a dirt line across her stomach too. Her hair was pinned up to keep it out of her face.

Suddenly, she whooped, body bending back to cackle at the ceiling like some deranged raven. “Holy shit,” she crowed, snapping straight and almost bounding down the hallway. “And here I thought I had the best surprise. Let me see, let me see.”

She grabbed at his shirt's collar, pulling at it to try and look down at his chest.

“Bev!” He smacked her hands away. She was persistent, and dove for the hem of his shirt, yanking it up. He snatched it back down before it got too high. “For Christ’s sake, what are you doing, you goddamn lunatic?”

She smirked, letting go to look him up and down. She was pleased as punch. “What do you think I’m doing? Checking to make sure the good doctor wore you out *all* over and didn’t just give you some ridiculous hickeys.”

Will slapped a hand over his neck. Molly choked.

“I mean, hot damn Talk about possessive,” she said, poking at one of the marks even as Will batted her hand away. She sounded proud. “Don’t they hurt?”

Will glared at her. “You’ve had a hickey before. You should know.”

“Ah,” Bev started, running a hand over her mouth. A wicked look crossed her face. “Not really. I’m more of a doer than a receiver.”

“Nope. I don’t want to know.” Will had absolutely zero interest in Bev’s love life.

“What doesn’t Will want to know?” Zeller asked, appearing next to Bev. His eyes instantly went to the bruises on Will’s neck. His eyes bulged, brows shooting up to his hairline. “What the fuck Will? Were you mauled by a cat?” He took a step closer. “Are those *bite* marks?”

“Are those real pearls?” Bev piped in.

Will wanted to disappear into the floor. “No, I was not mauled by a cat. Or any other animal.”

“Just a horny doctor,” Bev sang, rocking on her heels and swinging her arms. “Bout time too. Thought the poor man would explode from frustration. Poor Will never makes life easy on anyone. And he was clearly happy about you finally letting him do you based on that new jewelry.”

“The jewelry has nothing to do with it. And Hannibal didn’t maul me.”

“Your neck says otherwise.”

Will pointed a finger at her. “You butt out of it.”

She made the exaggerated motion of zipping her lips and throwing away an invisible key.

Now that Zeller had time to process things, he was ready to make the situation worse. “You know, there are theories that foreplay wasn’t really a thing until the last few hundred years.”

All three of them just stared. Bev snorted, Will rubbed his forehead, and Molly looked at him slacked jaw.

“No it’s true. Because like, sex was seen as sinful, so you know people just did it to get it over with, rather than to enjoy it.”

“That…” Bev paused, trying to think how she wanted to phrase the next part, “seems hard to prove. I mean, what did they do? Go dig up graves to ask people about their sex lives?”

Will didn’t want to know. “Okay, that’s enough.” He turned to Bev. “What surprise?”

He hadn’t missed those words. They’d just gotten buried under her interest in his hickeys and pearls. The best way to distract them from talking about him was getting them focused on something else.

Bev’s eyes lit up, doing a wiggle dance in one place. “Hold on, I’ll show you!” and then disappeared into her tattoo room, door slamming shut behind her.

Will looked to Zeller who threw up his hands in surrender. “Don’t ask me. She’d bury me alive with only a straw to breathe through if I spoiled it.”

Will chuckled. She would.

There was some yelling, her voice muffled with the wall. But he caught, “Stay still!” and “Be good!” These were usually followed by thumps and curses. At one point he heard a tray hit the floor. The sound rattled through the shop. Price yelled through the wall to ask if everything was okay.

Will looked down to Winston who had moved again to sit on his feet. Catching him looking, Winston’s tail thumped. His nose lifted in a silent plea. Will gave him scratches.

Another crash came from Bev’s room and then victory yells.

Will just hoped she hadn’t broken any of the equipment with whatever she was doing.

It took a second, but her door opened and she slid out, hands hidden behind her back as she sauntered down the hallway. “Okay, guess what I have? It’s something I’ve really wanted.”

Zeller refused to look anywhere but his shoes for fear of giving it away. Molly gave a delicate cough and went back to typing.

“Me getting laid.”

“No, but true. Guess again.”

“It’s an animal isn’t it.” He couldn’t think of anything else she would be yelling at and begging to be good.

Laughing, she whipped out, not one but two, kittens. “Yes! Aren’t they adorable? Meet Her Highness Weezle Wigglepaws and Emperor Scrumptious Ugabaluga. Or Miss Wigs and Scrums for short. Weez and Oongaboonga work too.”

He really hadn’t expected her to be holding two tortoiseshell colored, rather disheveled looking, kittens. Little green eyes stared up at him, angry and clearly plotting world domination at the mistreatment. He’d be plotting revenge too if he had names like those.

“What happened to the other two names you were gonna use?”

“They lost votes.”

Getting Winston to shift off him, he walked closer and leaned down to look at them more closely. They hissed in turns, fur sticking up in all angles. “I thought your place didn’t allow pets?” It was one of the reasons she had decided to live there. To keep her from buying a cat.

Bev scrunched her nose, bringing the miscreants up to smother them in kisses. They didn’t look amused by it. “They were tied in a plastic bag in a garbage bin next to my place. Poor things were crying for help. I couldn’t just leave them.”

“And now that she’s named them, you don’t really think there’s a chance of her giving them up, do you?” Zeller piped in keeping a good distance from the angry dust bunnies. His aunt had once owned a cat that was, as he called it, a ‘vindictive son of a bitch.’ Apparently it would pee in his shoes every time he visited and poop in his backpack. There had been one time it had launched itself from the second floor to pounce on the top of his head. He’d had an aversion for them since.

Winston appeared by Will, nosing at the small furballs. Surprisingly, they didn’t hiss at him, but their tails shot straight up, paws wiggling around.

He sneezed, turning doleful eyes to his human. *What are these things?*

Will rubbed his ear.

Bev shot a look at Zeller. “Of course I’m keeping them. The shelters are overcrowded as it is. With prices going up, the first thing people are getting rid of are their cats and dogs. If these guys go in, they’ll never come out again.”

She wasn’t wrong. It was probably the reason the kittens had ended up in the trash to begin with. People didn’t take the time or money to fix their animals, and then when they had a

litter, they didn't want to deal with the consequences. Will tugged at his earrings, staring at the angry, spitting fluffs.

"Can I keep them here?" He shouldn't have been surprised she asked. "They can keep Winston company, and I won't have to worry about spot inspections as much."

He had no reason to say no.

Zeller eyed the cats. "Are you sure they aren't going to attack people?"

Bev sniffed. "I'd attack people too if the last human I saw tried to suffocate me and my sibling."

Will really didn't mind. He liked animals. But he turned to Molly. "Got any objections?" As a worker sharing the space, she had the right to voice any complaints.

She smiled, turning away from the computer. "Me and Wally love cats. But we can't afford one, so I wouldn't mind them being here."

Will noticed she didn't ask to hold one. But, he wouldn't either with the way they were squirming in Bev's hands.

Winston investigated again, front paws lifting a little off the floor so he could get a good sniff. His tail thumped slowly as he came nose to nose with each of the cats. He got a paw to the muzzle and a squeaky cry telling him to go away.

"Course she does," Zeller muttered, edging past Bev to go back to his room. He never turned his back on the kittens. "Just what we need in the office. Vindictive little shits."

~TBC~

Chapter End Notes

I am 100% an animal person. I like cats and dogs. But, I definitely prefer cats to dogs. The easiest way I can explain why is something I once read, "If you want a pet and aren't sure whether to get a cat or dog, here is the way to decide. If you want a roommate, someone who will hang with you but ultimately do their own thing: get a cat. If you want a toddler, someone who needs constant watching, exercise, and love: get a dog."

Unsurprisingly, as I am not a kid person, I am more of a cat person. But if offered both, I take both hahaha

Predators and Prey

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Freddie talk

Chapter Notes

Are we ready for this?

TW: reference/mentions of torture

Not beta read.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal finalized his notes on Mr. Froideveaux.

Tapping his pen gently against the paper, he let out a long breath, leaning back in his seat. A small headache was beginning to twinge at his temple. There were very few people who could cause him to feel like this and still be allowed to walk out his door.

He'd originally taken the man as a colleague had begged him to. She'd been at her wits-end. She was afraid of running into the man around every corner.

Hannibal could now understand her desperation to get him away from him, as he'd run into the man in the produce section of the store on four separate occasions already. The first time, he'd been skeptical and wary why the man had approached him, even knowing all his different neuroses.

Hannibal had been evaluating the quality of the lettuce for the first meal he was planning for Molly to give to Will, under the pretext she'd cooked it, when a wavering voice popped up beside him. "Dr. Lecter! What a surprise!"

Turning slightly, Hannibal found Franklin standing next to him, bouncing on the balls of his feet. A squat man, with a tiny black mustache and slicked back black hair, he vaguely resembled that of a bouncing ball as he rocked back and forth in nervous excitement. He wore a cheaper copy to what Hannibal had worn during their first session, a deep blue windowpane patterned three piece. Except, Franklin's was an off black, and the material

looked rough and uncomfortable. The black buttons of his vest seemed to be straining to remain closed over his round stomach.

Sweat beaded along the shorter man's temple and cheeks.

"I didn't know you shopped here," Franklin went on, hands twisting in front of him. He wasn't holding a basket. "Did you come here a lot? I do. It's a great place to shop. For groceries I mean. I wouldn't shop for clothes here. But I'm sure you already know that"

He was speaking very fast and his hands had moved to tug on his jacket.

Hannibal gingerly set the vegetable down, straightening to look down at the man. "Mr. Froidevaux. It is surprising to find you here as well. I did not think you tended to frequent this area of the city." They both knew that Franklin didn't as he lived on the other side of the city, far from Hannibal's office and home. "What brings you to this side of the city?"

More sweat ran down Franklin's face.

"Oh, you know, this place has the best options for groceries. Figured I should buy here rather than another store."

Hannibal shifted his hold on his basket, saying nothing. While Franklin hadn't given him any reasons to worry during their initial meeting, something dangerous was creeping through Hannibal, muting the things around them. His entire focus was on the rotund man in front of him.

He wouldn't be made into a meal. And, he'd need information from him first. Find out exactly who he knew and why he was showing up around him. That, and moving someone as large as Franklin would be rather arduous. Hannibal would call Mr. Matthews to handle things initially. At least to move him somewhere quiet where Hannibal could talk to him.

"Is that cheese?"

The question pulled Hannibal from images of red and agony.

Franklin was peering into his basket, curiosity burning in his dark eyes. "Do you like cheese? You don't have cheddar. Why? Cheddar's good. What are you going to use them for?"

Hannibal's lip curled up slightly. There and gone before Franklin could see it. "I do not need cheddar for what I am planning."

Franklin shuffled closer. Hannibal stiffened, refusing to step back from the man. His fingers tightened on his basket, the image of bashing it over the man's head, his food flying everywhere, appearing in his head unbidden.

The shorter man craned his neck, trying to read the italicized labels on many of the cheeses.

Hannibal subtly moved the basket behind him. "As much as I would enjoy speaking with you, Mr. Froideaux, I'm afraid I am short on time."

“Are you? Are you going to the opera tonight? Is that why?” Franklin asked, going back to bouncing on his heels again.

Hannibal’s eyes narrowed. They’d never discussed the opera before.

Oblivious to the growing danger, Franklin grinned up at his psychiatrist. “I hear it’s *La Bohème* . I know people like it, and it’s shown a lot, but I find it shallow. Not for deep thinkers like us, right? I guess it’s good for those who only sort of like it. But sitting through hours of people acting pitiful due to a poor life, I just have a hard time. It’s simply too simple. Nothing to really sink our teeth into.” He was speaking fast again. “Would you like to sit with me?”

Hannibal smiled sharply. “I would enjoy hearing your thoughts on the best operas during our next session. But, I do not befriend patients, and I really must be going.”

He slipped away, Franklin waving behind him. “Okay! See you later Dr. Lecter.”

Afterwards, Hannibal had Barney dig through Franklin’s background. It seems the only danger he posed was that he was as clingy as a baby chick. And as annoying as one.

He stuck to whoever he was currently obsessed with. He’d follow them around, much like a chick does with its mother hen, crying out for food and attention. Something that would be highly unpleasant if one attracting the attention was *not* the mother. But, there was no need to permanently remove the man.

But, Hannibal was considering transferring him to another psychiatrist. At this rate, Mr. Froideveaux would ‘run into’ him while he was with Will. And as he didn’t know who was fixated on William, he wanted to keep contact with outsiders to a minimum. That and he had no desire for Franklin to put his focus on Will.

Will hadn’t been wrong when he’d pointed out the fact that their being together was no secret.

Hannibal's eyes slid to a drawer of his desk where documents on Fredrick Chilton sat. Just because Will didn’t want to do anything currently didn’t mean he couldn’t begin to design plans for the fellow psychiatrist. Good art took time, not just in producing, but in planning and designing.

The right colors, the right pose, the right message.

There were so many options. So many possibilities that this could take. And ultimately, it would be William who would decide the direction that this piece took. Like an unknown flower finally sprouting, Hannibal was waiting to see how Will would finally bloom.

Already, there was a spark of creativity and art in his workmanship. Hannibal had seen it branded into Ms. Lounds skin when he’d seen her. Clumsy, yes, but the beauty, the intention, the potential, had all been there. With his help, Will would continue to grow. To sharpen his skills.

Not that Ms. Lounds had been all that pleased with the turn of events. She much preferred the way he acted previously.

Hannibal had decided a visit was in order after he and Will had parted ways. He'd had time before his first patient to spend some bonding time with Ms. Lounds.

"You really think you're helping him," Freddie had wheezed between swollen lips, tugging at the ropes that trapped her hands to the arms of a wooden chair. Like those used for executions. Her skin had certainly not taken well to the abuse of the tattoo gun. Her face had swollen to the point where her eyes were nothing but slits. The rat on her cheek was bloated and lazy.

Hannibal had looked up at her from his book, one foot resting on his knee as he reclined in a black leather chair. Barney stood in the corner of the completely empty, white room that was located in the deep bowels of *Alkis* , hands clasped around a dark leather bag. He was only there to await orders. Two more men stood outside of the room to keep guard at all times.

They'd been sitting in silence for over an hour now.

Hannibal had been reading the Italian classic *The Betrothed,* sipping his cappuccino. He'd ignored the way Freddie had stared at him. Now that she'd finally spoken, he closed his book and carefully placed it on the pale stone side table that sat next to his chair.

Looking up at Freddie, he smiled pleasantly. "Beg your pardon, Ms. Lounds. Who? As a psychiatrist, it's my job to help many people."

"Graham." His name was practically spat out of her mouth. Hannibal's hackles rose at her tone. "You think that you're doing something good for him."

He hummed, folding his hands in his lap. "I am afraid I am unaware of what you are referring to. I have not changed William in the slightest." If anything, he'd only worked to create a space for Will to feel safe enough to be himself.

Freddie laughed, the noise sharp in the quiet room. "Right. Mr. Ripper doesn't do anything. He lets others make their own choices." The words were mocking. The pain was making her reckless with her words. "You're just magnanimous like that."

Hannibal wasn't surprised she'd figured out who he was. Everyone knew that Will's lover was the Chesapeake Ripper. Hannibal showing up with him confirmed whatever suspicions she might have harbored towards him.

"But not everyone is as kind as you are, oh great and wonderful Chesapeake Ripper," she went on, panting from the effort of talking. She could barely move her mouth from the pain and the swelling. That wasn't stopping her from spewing insults and threats though. "And Graham isn't nearly as clever as some."

How rude.

Hannibal tilted his head, quirking an eyebrow. Barney shifted.

The change in the atmosphere in the room was palpable.

Hannibal sat forward, his movements slow enough to be wholly unnerving. His eyes tracked every twitch Freddie made. On her carotid artery that pulsed hard against her pale skin. On the way her skin pulled irritated in the more delicate areas of her face, like around the nose and lips. The way blood oozed from the sores that were already beginning to form from her skin rejecting the ink. The fineness of her bones. On the thinness of her fingers.

So slender and elegant.

Not the fingers that should be on that of a pig. And most certainly not on rats.

Her bare feet showed that her toes were similar. Just as well groomed and slender. Not showing all the dirt she digs up to sell to the highest bidder. Not showing the fact she was a scavenger.

Hannibal let his eyes fall away, down to his own well taken care of hands. “I assume you are speaking of the fine individual who is after William.”

Freddie snorted, throwing her head back so her red curls danced. Pus was already slipping out of her face, mingling with the blood that dripped onto her shirt. “You’re so powerful. So much money. So many little helpers. But you seem to forget that you aren’t the only big fish in this pond. There are people who are just like you.”

If she could have moved her eyebrows, she would have mimicked his eyebrow raise.

“You may be a predator Mr. Ripper, but you aren’t the only one. And Graham is like the rest of us in this godforsaken city. Prey.”

One hand in Hannibal’s lap moved to curl on the arm of the chair. “Is that so, Ms. Lounds.” His voice was nothing more than a rumble.

Rage was unfurling in his gut.

Busted lips curled into a smile. Bright white teeth, stained in crimson, stark against the red and black backdrop that was Freddie’s face. “Even the mighty Chesapeake Ripper won’t be able to keep Graham safe. Not forever.”

Silence rang in Hannibal’s ears, even as his heart roared in his chest. His face remained politely interested. Both hands were now pressing harsh onto the arm of the chair, fingers pale.

“But,” Freddie said suddenly, breath puffing out in gasps, “let's make a deal. I give you the name, and you let me go. I’ll disappear. You’ll never see me again. And then Graham is safe.”

Relaxing back in the chair, Hannibal propped his head on a hand, eyes fathomless.

Barney kept his eyes straight ahead, nothing more than a piece of furniture in the small room.

“Everyone will be happy.” She paused, wincing, more blood spotting her shirt. “Mostly.”

He didn’t doubt she would nurse a nasty grudge against Will for the art he made of her face. Even if he honored a deal between them, there was certainly no future where she would ‘disappear’ from his life. She was much too vindictive for that. Even with her rather strong self preservation instinct.

Hannibal took a long drink of his cappuccino, finishing it off. The clink of porcelain was much too sweet in such a stifling atmosphere.

“Ms. Lounds, I am afraid I must ask you a question before we can negotiate any prospect of a deal. My curiosity is my besetting sin. I ask you to indulge me. ”

Stained teeth briefly appeared again. “Of course, Dr. Lecter. How might I be of assistance?”

Hannibal looked at Freddie as one might observe a new species of sea slug. “Can you please detail for me what you believe happiness to be.”

Freddie’s head weighed to one side. “For me?”

A sharp smile was her answer. “At least to start.”

Swallowing, Freddie took a minute to think. It was difficult to focus on much with the burning, itching, horrifying feeling that was her face. “Being able to buy what I wish.” She paused again, focusing on keeping her expression relaxed to keep from pulling at her skin. “Being respected.” Being feared worked too, but respect was a good start. Another pause. “Money, naturally. Never worrying about it.”

Hannibal hummed in encouragement.

She closed her eyes, trying to think past the pain it took to talk. She just needed to convince him she was of use to him. “Having a platform where I can write news articles.” Where she could build an audience that would rely on her for information. Build a safety net out of them.

“And what about Will? What do you believe would make him happy?”

The question was soft, like cats paws.

She snorted again, eyes still shut. Even the light hurt them. Everything hurt really. “Dogs. Being buried under dogs and never having to talk to anyone.” The sentence hung there a moment before she amended, “With you now. Which is new.”

The words were thick. Both with the disgust she felt for Graham heavy on her tongue and the fact she was dehydrated enough that her mouth was full of cotton.

“Is that so.”

Freddie’s head lolled to the side. “Mm. He’d even leave that Asian bitch if it meant people left him alone.” She and Bev had never gotten along, not surprisingly. The twat had always

hovered over her shoulder like some canary, ready to sing out any time she did wrong. There were a few times she'd imagine driving the heel of her stilettos through the woman's eyeballs. See how well she'd sing then. "He's his own brand of crazy."

Gods, even her hot breath hurt her skin.

"Course, everyone already knows that. You can look him up on the internet and find that out."

Freddie had known what she was crawling into bed with when she applied for the job at the tattoo shop. But she'd also known with him, there was a chance of digging up something for a good amount of cash. He was a psychiatrist's wet dream.

"And what about me, Ms. Lounds? What do you envision my happiness to be?"

The words, sweet as honey, poured over her skin. Warm and inviting. It was easy for Freddie to see how he'd been able to hide himself as a mafia boss for so long. Who'd ever imagine a brutal serial killer could speak so appealingly?

Freddie let her head fall back. She couldn't let it rest against her shoulder. Her skin was too sensitive. And as tired as she was, she knew sleep wouldn't find her. It just hurt. Her face, her hands, her head. It all hurt. She just wanted everything to stop hurting just for a moment.

She just needed to wait till her body grew exhausted enough to drop off.

"Ms. Lounds, please answer the question."

Hannibal's voice pulled her attention. She cracked her eyes open, finding the lights above too bright to handle. She squeezed them shut again.

"Respect. Happily married off to Graham." She pretended to hesitate. Her following words were slightly muffled from pain and exhaustion. "Me gone. Which I can do. It wouldn't be hard to do. I don't own much so moving wouldn't take any time at all. I could be gone from the city in less than two hours."

She'd need to find a car, but that wouldn't be too hard. She still had some things on enough people to be able to pull a string or two. And if all else failed, she had enough to buy a used one. Anything to get out of the reach of the Chesapeake Ripper.

Hannibal hummed, clearly expecting more from her. But she didn't have anything else. Her brain wasn't working as fast right now. She just needed to focus on talking her way out of this situation.

Pain, sharp and cold, sliced up her right hand.

Jerking up, eyes wide, breath seizing, she found Hannibal standing behind her, arms circling around the chair so that her ring finger sat between the gleaming blade of a pair of small shears. Blood was already welling up under the edges of the unsuspecting weapon. It ran down her hands and onto the arm of the chair.

She'd never heard him move. Hadn't noticed him coming up right behind her. How had she not heard him?

Freddie was gasping, pleading already wheezing out of her as Hannibal tightened his hold on her hands. The leather bag Barney had been holding was now rolled out over the small coffee table, scalpels and various other instruments shining impatiently under the harsh overhead light. Watching with a smile as she tried to jerk her hand away from the blades, he tutted at her jerking. There was nothing warm about that smile.

There was no need to rush this.

"I must say Ms. Lounds, your answer was almost satisfying."

Red curls flew around as she shook her head frantically, left hand curling into a fist. The shears held her finger right about the second knuckle captive.

"Unfortunately, you were rather rude when speaking about William," Hannibal murmured quietly, death resting in his tone. "He is not prey. He is not a cash out. He is *no one's."* The words were snarled.

Freddie watched something monstrous unravel in Hannibal's gaze. His next words were a venomous promise, roiling with death, decay, and dread. There was the promise of a future of pain and something worse.

"The only way you will disappear from my sight will be in multiple body bags."

Freddie was screaming before he'd finished. It wasn't until he clipped the shears that she realized she had not in fact been hurting everywhere. But, she would now.

The fresh memory from this morning curled the corners of Hannibal's mouth. Of course, there was still a long way to go with her. He'd left Mr. Matthews to bandage what was left of her hands and feet so she wouldn't bleed to death. He wasn't done with her yet.

That and he still needed a name. She'd been screeching too much to give him any good information.

Turning his thoughts to more enjoyable things, Hannibal mused over various ideas to present to Will on Chilton. Anticipation curled like a stretching cat in his gut. He'd keep the plans here until Will came to him about the situation. He didn't want his tattooist to feel pressured.

A phone rang, interrupting his thoughts.

It was his other work phone. The one that almost was never used while he was in his office.

Hannibal frowned, picking it up. It was Mr. Matthews.

"Sir," Barney said before Hannibal could greet him. There was enough panic in his voice to give Hannibal pause, "we have a problem. Ms. Lounds is gone."

An emotion that Hannibal was unfamiliar with exploded in his chest, turning him first ice cold and blazing hot. He could only imagine that this would be what panic would feel like. Something nasty and all consuming. His fingers went white around the phone.

Freddie's words repeated softly in his ear, over Mr. Matthew's voice telling him how he'd found the guards dead with a single bullet in the head, and the white room empty. *Even the mighty Chesapeake Ripper won't be able to keep Graham safe* .

Ms. Lounds was powerless, but whoever had gotten her out of his territory was not.

He was up and moving for the door before the thought had even finished. His mind, for the first time in his memory, couldn't function. It held onto a single word, unable to peel away from it long enough to issue orders to Barney.

Hannibal's office chair was left knocked over. The office door was hanging ajar to an empty room when Mr. Waltzwert showed up for his appointment with Dr. Lecter.

The word was pounding through Hannibal's head, his heart echoing it with every beat.

Will.

~End of Part 1~

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for completing Part/Book 1 *deep bow*

I look forward to creating the next part and other fanfics of this crazy duo. I appreciate all of your encouragement and dedication for hanging out long enough to make it to the end of this one!

Until Part 2....may all your fanfics end with happy endings you fanfic gremlins.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!